Bennett • Cafaro • Prianto • Peteri

WITCHBLADE®

image

4 OCT

DIGITAL EDITION US

TOP COW UNIVERSE

WITCHBLADE®

created by **Marc Silvestri**, **David Wohl**, **Brian Haberlin** & **Michael Turner**

New York City Police Detective Sara Pezzini's life was forever fractured by her father's murder. Cold, cunning, and hellbent on revenge, Sara now stalks a vicious criminal cabal beneath the city, where an ancient power collides and transforms her into something wild, magnificent, and beyond her darkest imaginings.

Previously...

Still reeling from the warehouse massacre where she first came into contact with the Witchblade, Sara explores the mystical gauntlet's power, strength, ability to heal, and the pleasure using it can bring, as well as the temptation to use that power in rage. Every temptation lures her from her mission to find her father's killer. But when the mysterious hunter, Ian Nottingham, promises to teach her to unlock her true, terrifying potential, Sara's instincts as a detective kick in, raising questions about the nature of the Witchblade and Ian's true intentions.

"Lilac Wine"

Written by **Marguerite Bennett**
Line art by **Giuseppe Cafaro**
Colors by **Arif Prianto**
Letters by **Troy Peteri**
Edits by **Marc Silvestri**, **Matt Hawkins**
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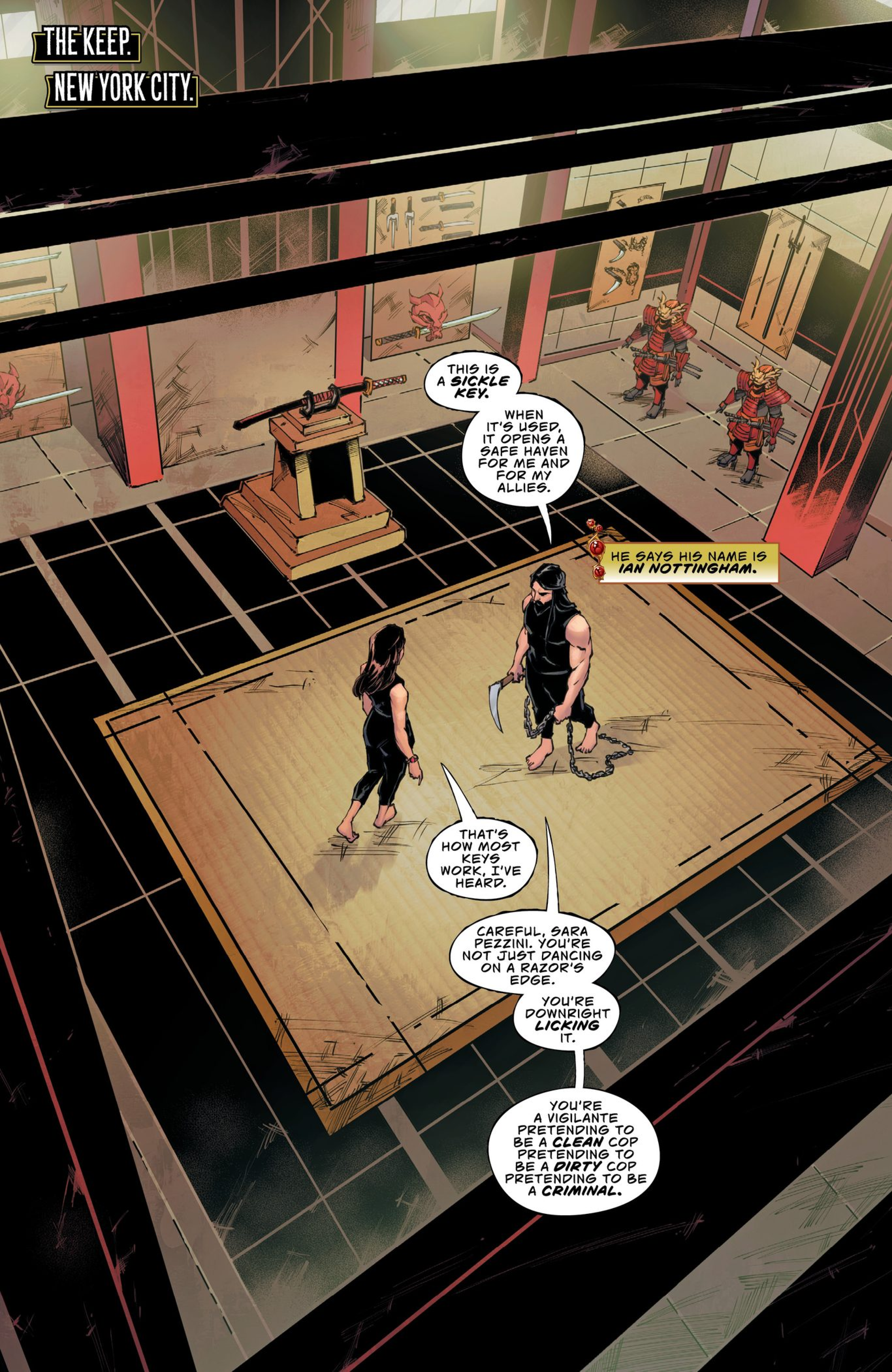
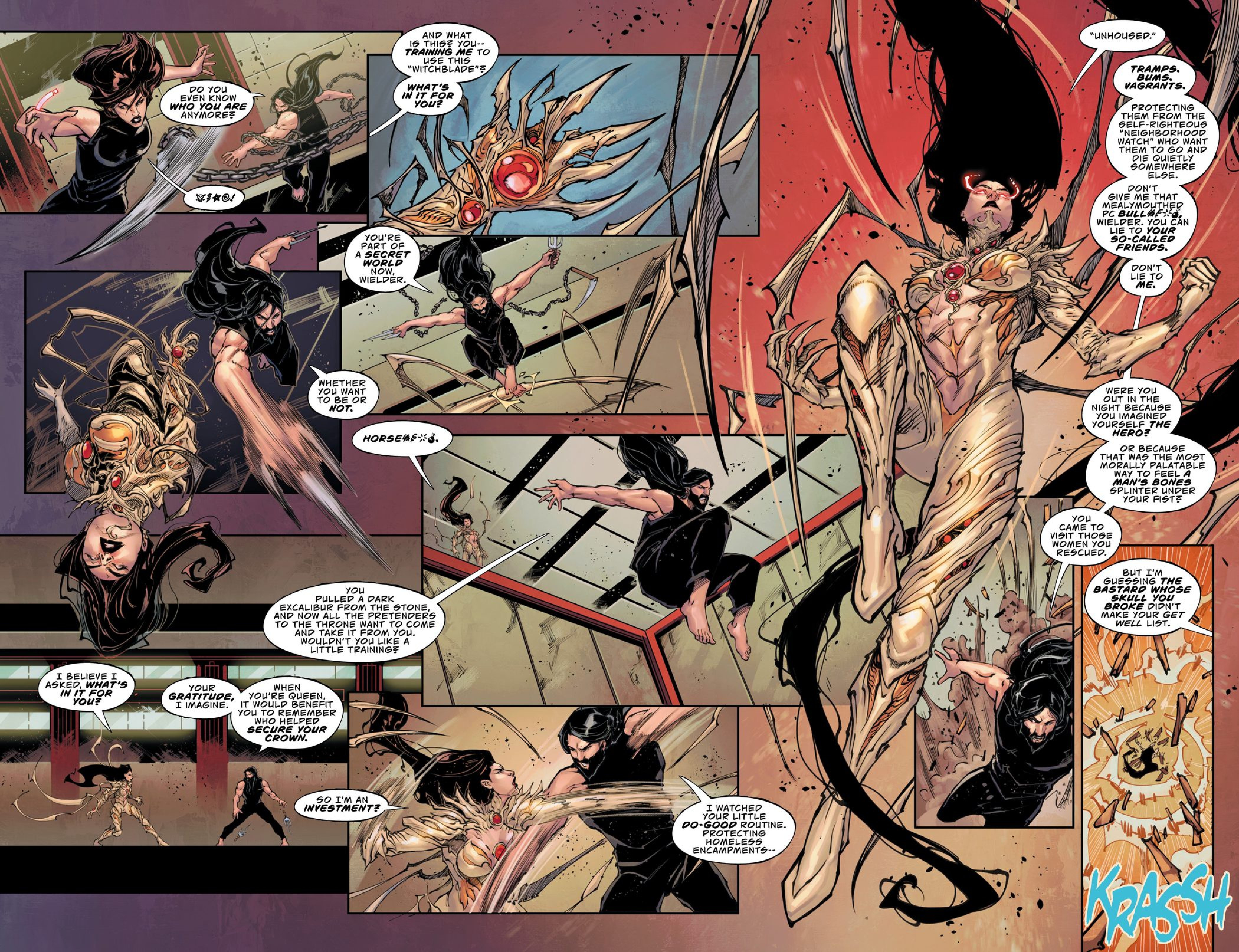
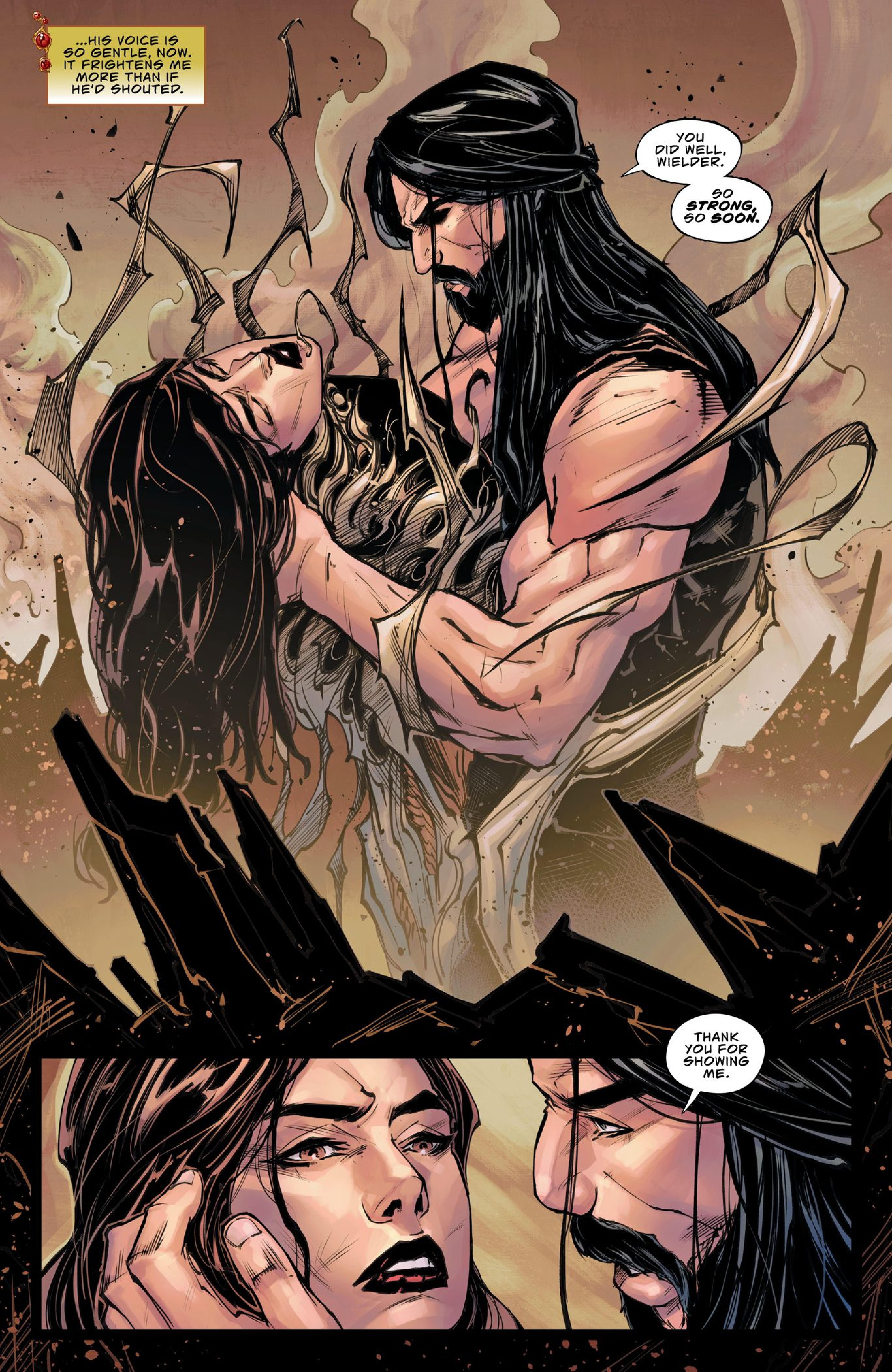
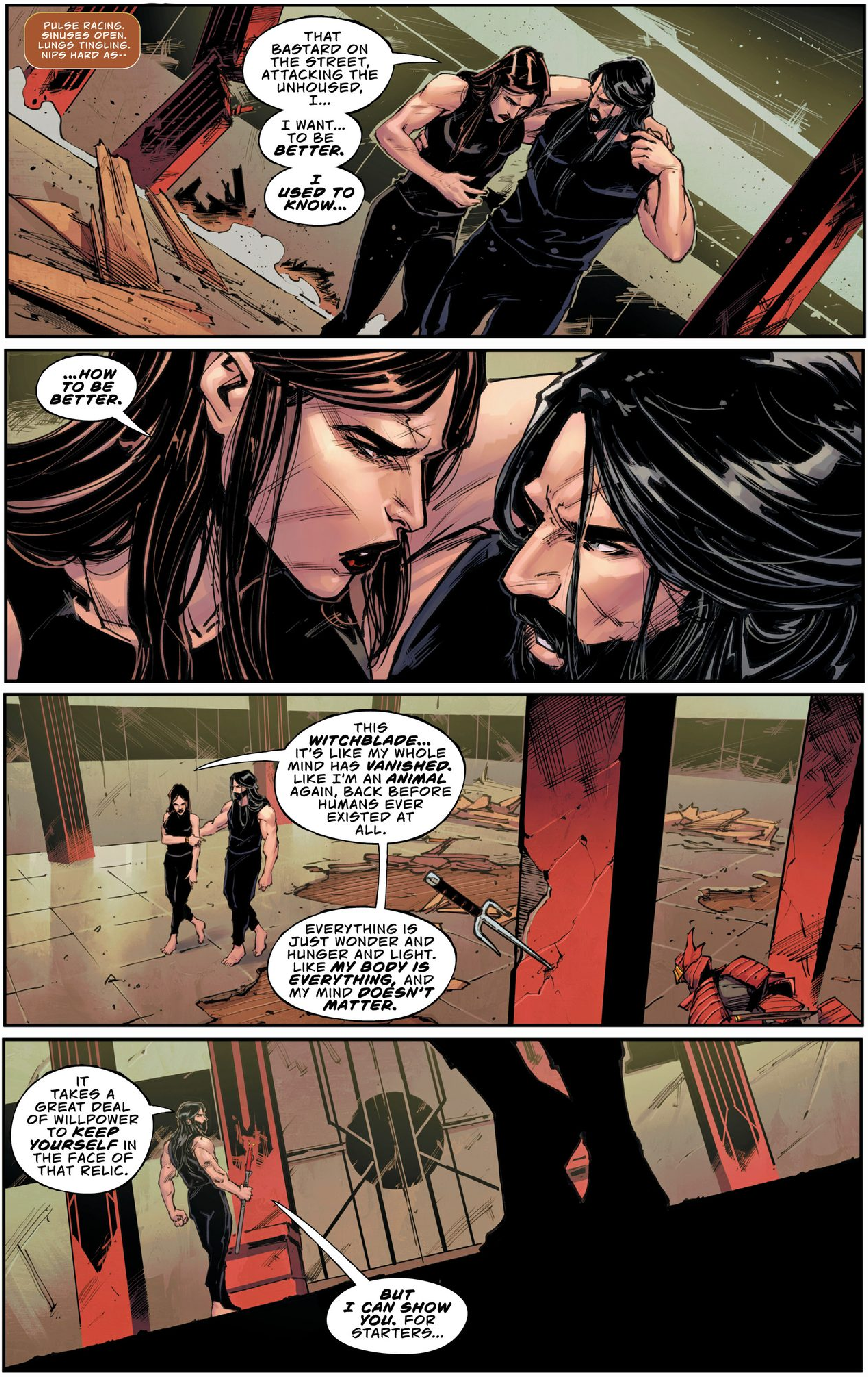
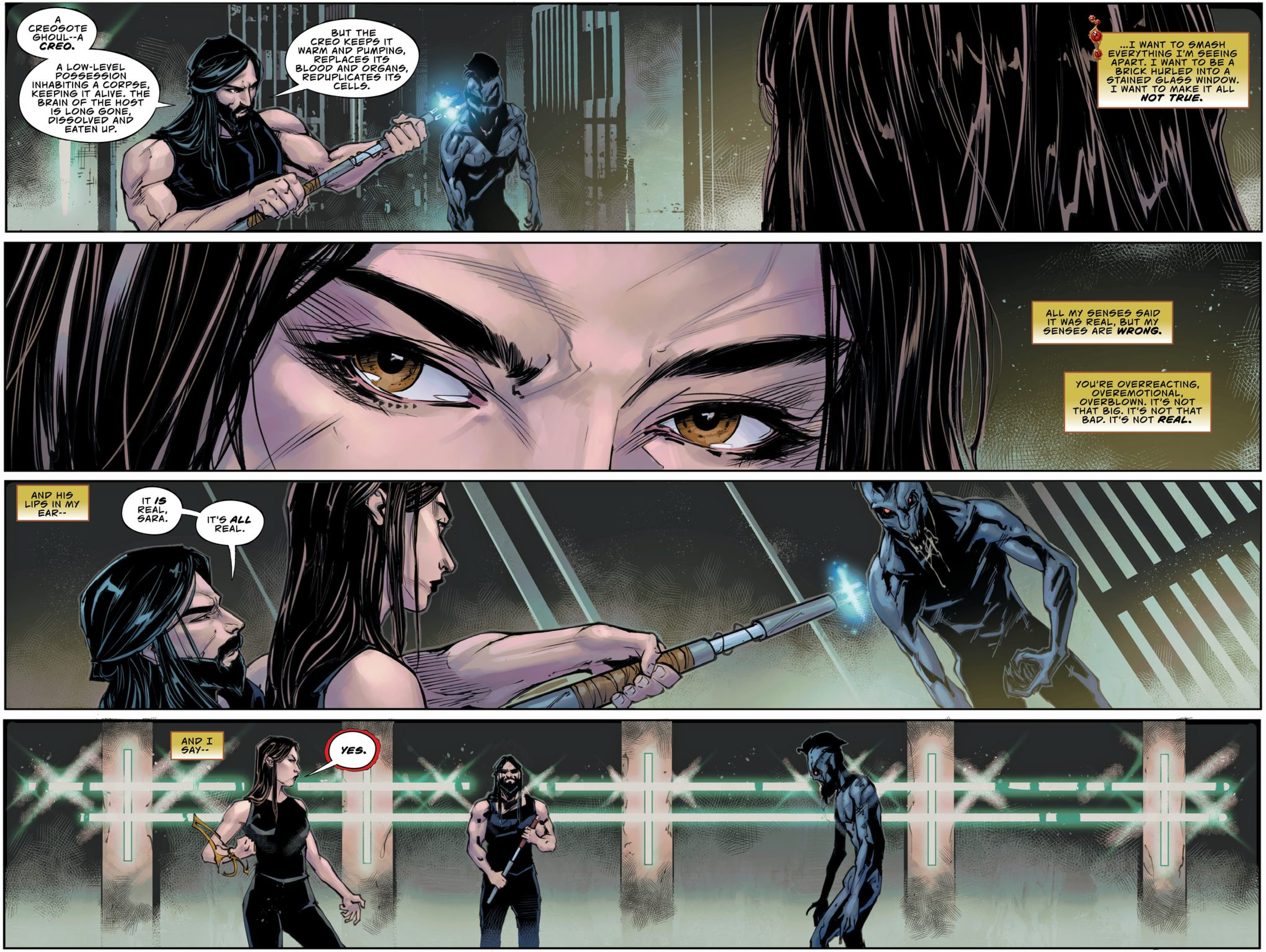
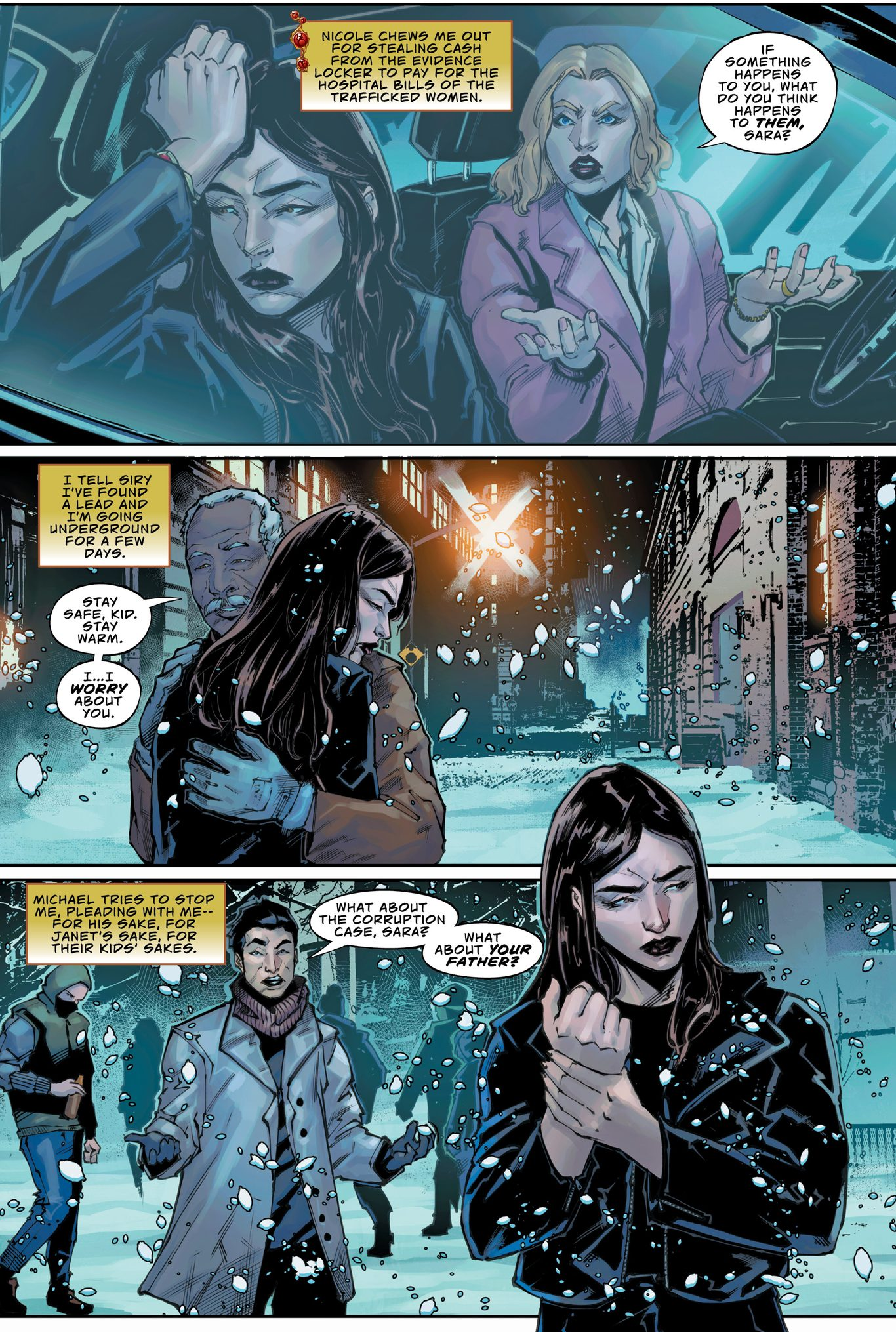

THE KEEP.
NEW YORK CITY.
THIS IS A SICKLE KEY.
WHEN IT'S USED, IT OPENS A SAFE HAVEN FOR ME AND FOR MY ALLIES.
HE SAYS HIS NAME IS IAN NOTTINGHAM.
THAT'S HOW MOST KEYS WORK, I'VE HEARD.
CAREFUL, SARA PEZZINI. YOU'RE NOT JUST DANCING ON A RAZOR'S EDGE.
YOU'RE DOWNRIGHT LICKING IT.
YOU'RE A VIGILANTE PRETENDING TO BE A CLEAN COP PRETENDING TO BE A DIRTY COP PRETENDING TO BE A CRIMINAL.

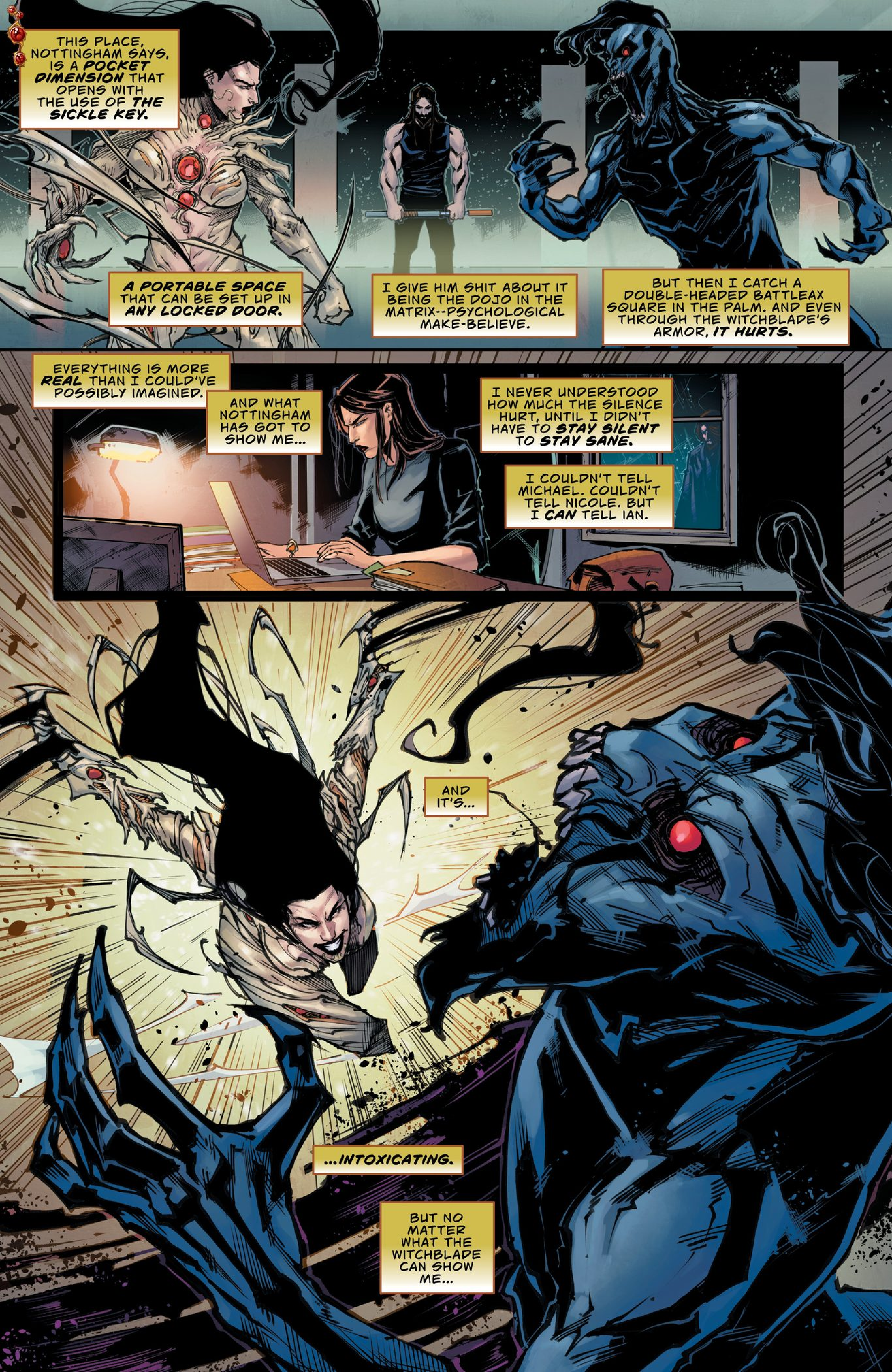

DO YOU EVEN KNOW **WHO YOU ARE** ANYMORE?
☠$★@!
AND WHAT IS THIS? YOU-- **TRAINING ME** TO USE THIS "WITCHBLADE"?
WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?
YOU'RE PART OF A **SECRET WORLD** NOW, WIELDER.
WHETHER YOU WANT TO BE OR **NOT.**
HORSE#%✳●.
YOU PULLED A DARK EXCALIBUR FROM THE STONE, AND NOW ALL THE PRETENDERS TO THE THRONE WANT TO COME AND TAKE IT FROM YOU. WOULDN'T YOU LIKE A LITTLE TRAINING?
I BELIEVE I ASKED, **WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?**
YOUR **GRATITUDE,** I IMAGINE.
WHEN YOU'RE QUEEN, IT WOULD BENEFIT YOU TO REMEMBER WHO HELPED **SECURE YOUR CROWN.**
SO I'M AN **INVESTMENT?**
I WATCHED YOUR LITTLE **DO-GOOD** ROUTINE. PROTECTING HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS--
"UNHOUSED."
TRAMPS. BUMS. VAGRANTS.
PROTECTING THEM FROM THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS "NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH" WHO WANT THEM TO GO AND DIE QUIETLY SOMEWHERE ELSE.
DON'T GIVE ME THAT MEALYMOUTHED PC **BULL#%✳●,** WIELDER. YOU CAN LIE TO **YOUR SO-CALLED FRIENDS.**
DON'T LIE TO **ME.**
WERE YOU OUT IN THE NIGHT BECAUSE YOU IMAGINED YOURSELF **THE HERO?**
OR BECAUSE THAT WAS THE MOST MORALLY PALATABLE WAY TO FEEL **A MAN'S BONES** SPLINTER UNDER YOUR FIST?
YOU CAME TO VISIT THOSE WOMEN YOU RESCUED.
BUT I'M GUESSING **THE BASTARD WHOSE SKULL YOU BROKE** DIDN'T MAKE YOUR GET WELL LIST.
KRASH

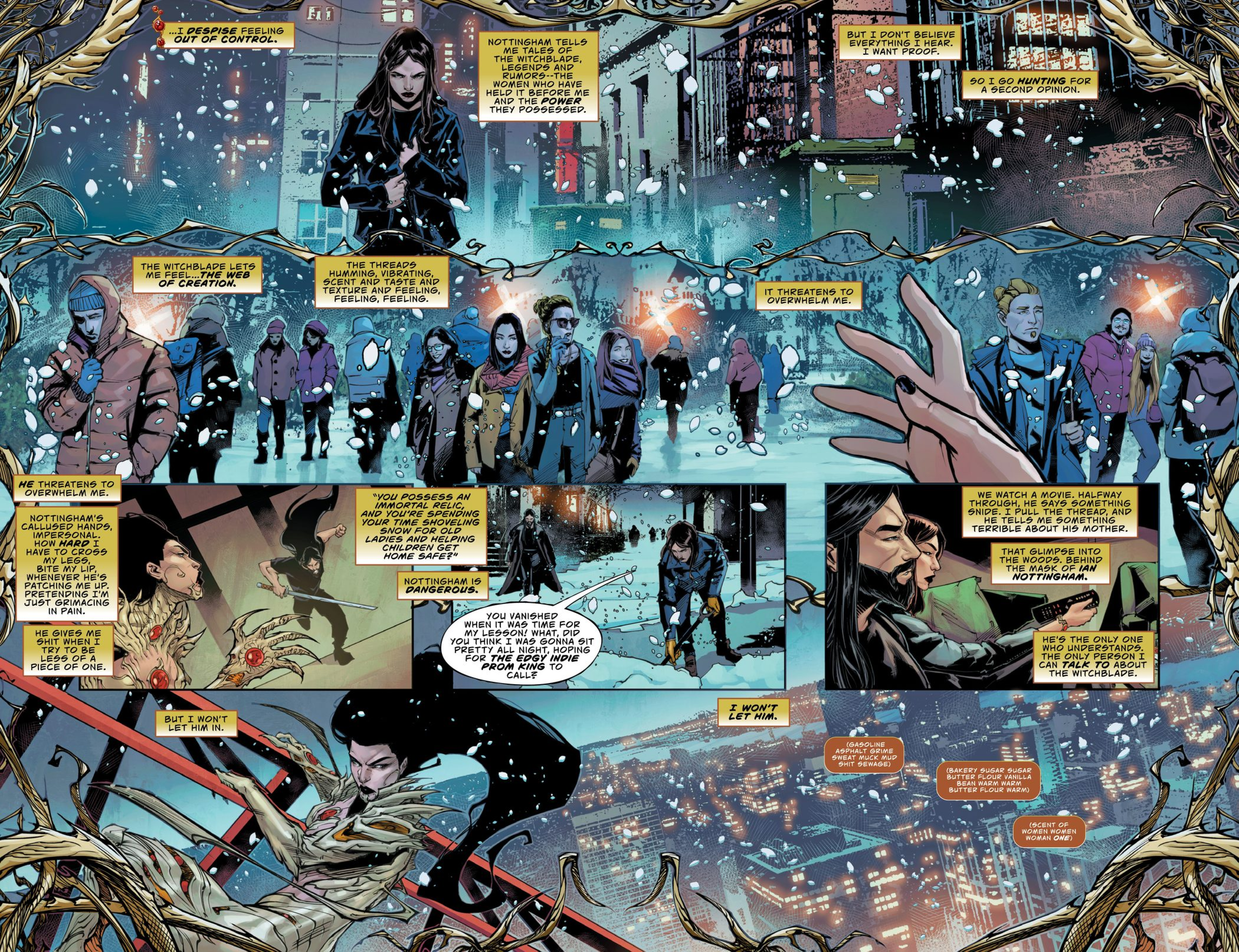

...HIS VOICE IS SO GENTLE, NOW. IT FRIGHTENS ME MORE THAN IF HE'D SHOUTED.
YOU DID WELL, WIELDER.
SO **STRONG,** SO **SOON.**
THANK YOU FOR SHOWING ME.

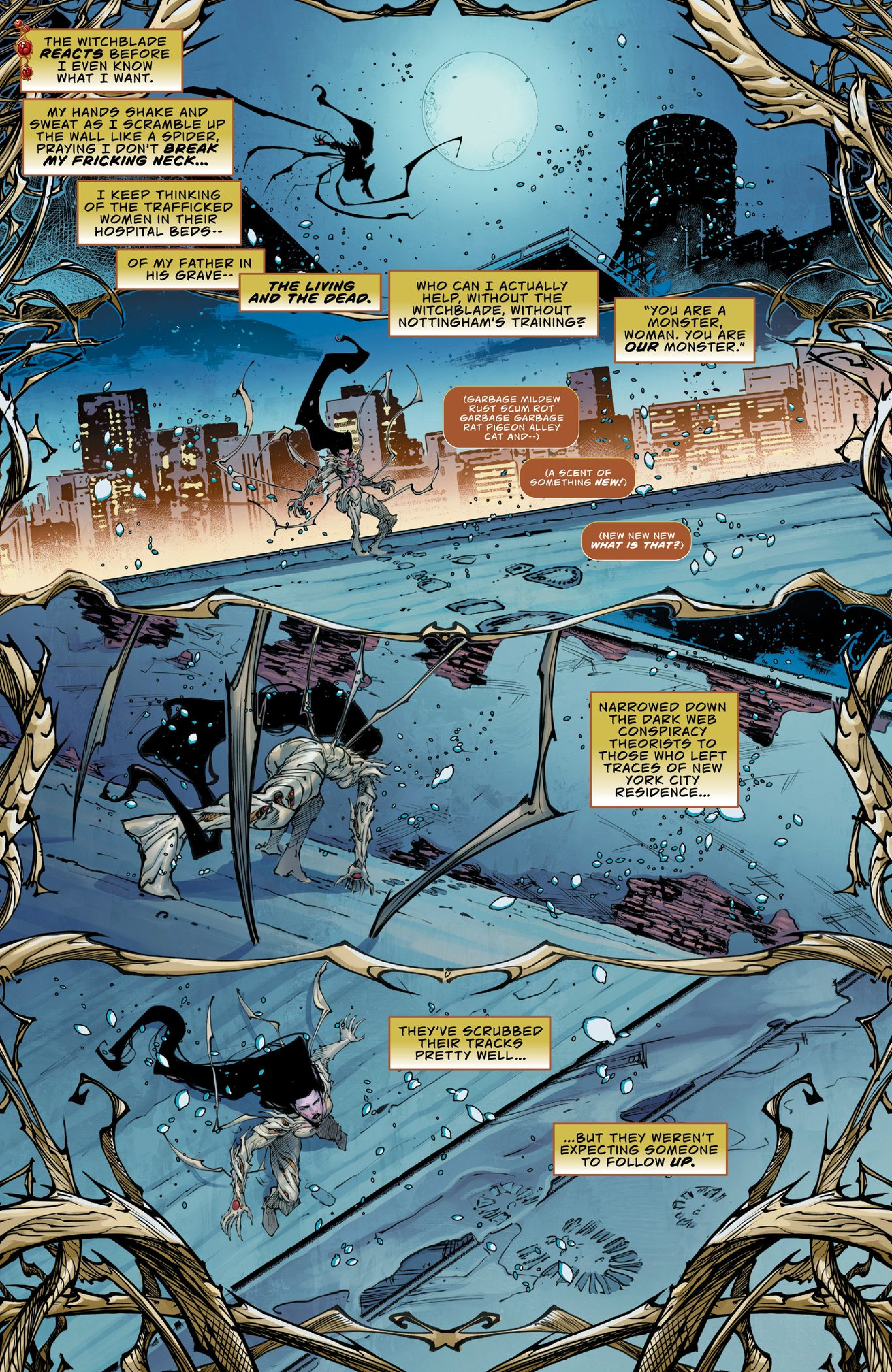

PULSE RACING. SINUSES OPEN. LUNGS TINGLING. NIPS HARD AS--
THAT BASTARD ON THE STREET, ATTACKING THE UNHOUSED, I...
I WANT... TO BE *BETTER.*
I USED TO KNOW...
...HOW TO BE BETTER.
THIS *WITCHBLADE...* IT'S LIKE MY WHOLE MIND HAS *VANISHED.* LIKE I'M AN *ANIMAL* AGAIN, BACK BEFORE HUMANS EVER EXISTED AT ALL.
EVERYTHING IS JUST WONDER AND HUNGER AND LIGHT. LIKE *MY BODY IS EVERYTHING,* AND MY MIND *DOESN'T MATTER.*
IT TAKES A GREAT DEAL OF WILLPOWER TO *KEEP YOURSELF* IN THE FACE OF THAT RELIC.
BUT I CAN SHOW YOU. FOR STARTERS...

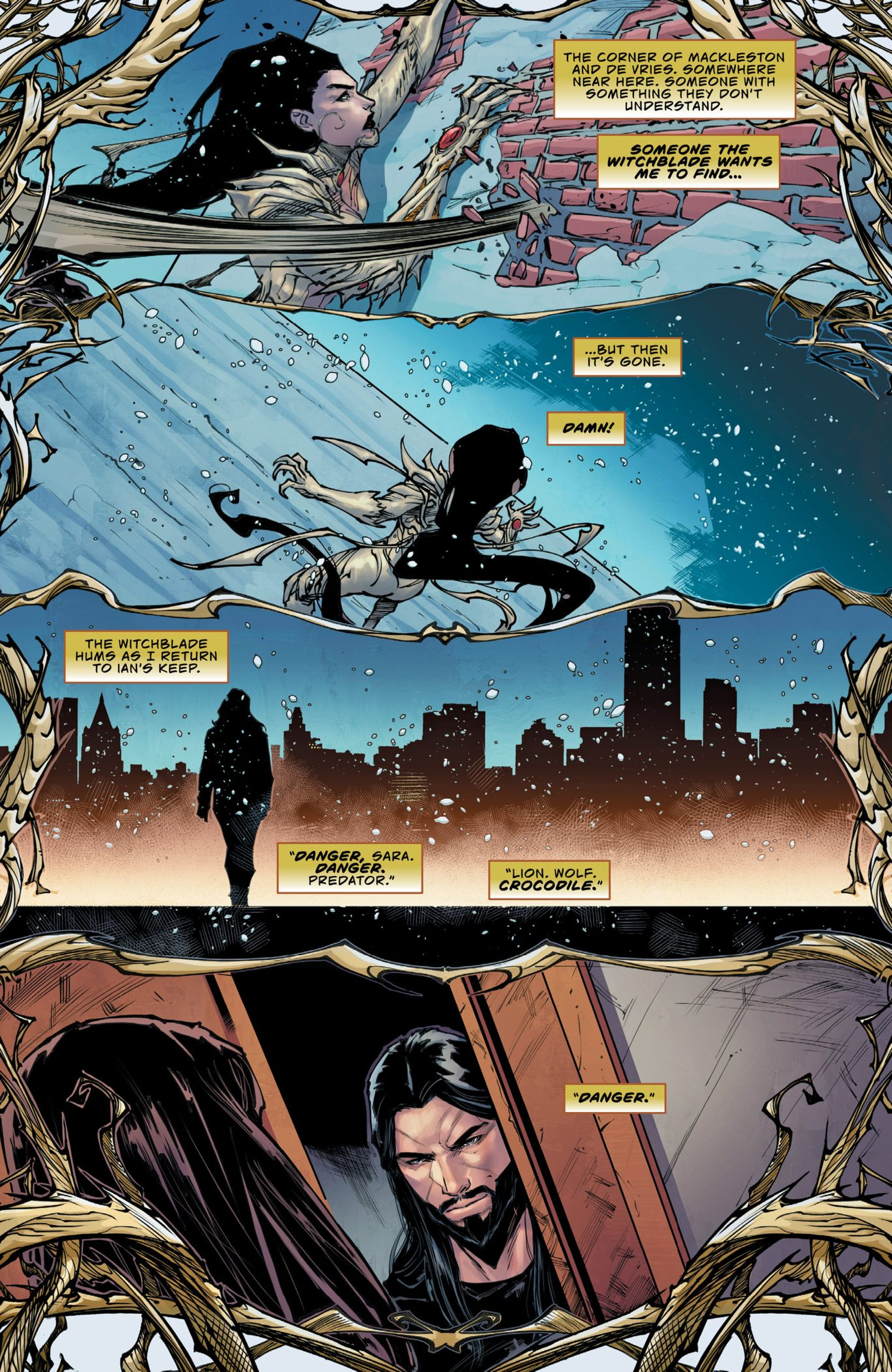

A CREOSOTE GHOUL--A *CREO.*
A LOW-LEVEL POSSESSION INHABITING A CORPSE, KEEPING IT ALIVE. THE BRAIN OF THE HOST IS LONG GONE, DISSOLVED AND EATEN UP.
BUT THE CREO KEEPS IT WARM AND PUMPING, REPLACES ITS BLOOD AND ORGANS, REDUPLICATES ITS CELLS.
...I WANT TO SMASH EVERYTHING I'M SEEING APART. I WANT TO BE A BRICK HURLED INTO A STAINED GLASS WINDOW. I WANT TO MAKE IT ALL ***NOT TRUE.***
ALL MY SENSES SAID IT WAS REAL, BUT MY SENSES ARE ***WRONG.***
YOU'RE OVERREACTING, OVEREMOTIONAL, OVERBLOWN. IT'S NOT THAT BIG. IT'S NOT THAT BAD. IT'S NOT ***REAL.***
AND HIS LIPS IN MY EAR--
IT ***IS*** REAL, SARA.
IT'S ***ALL*** REAL.
AND I SAY--
YES.

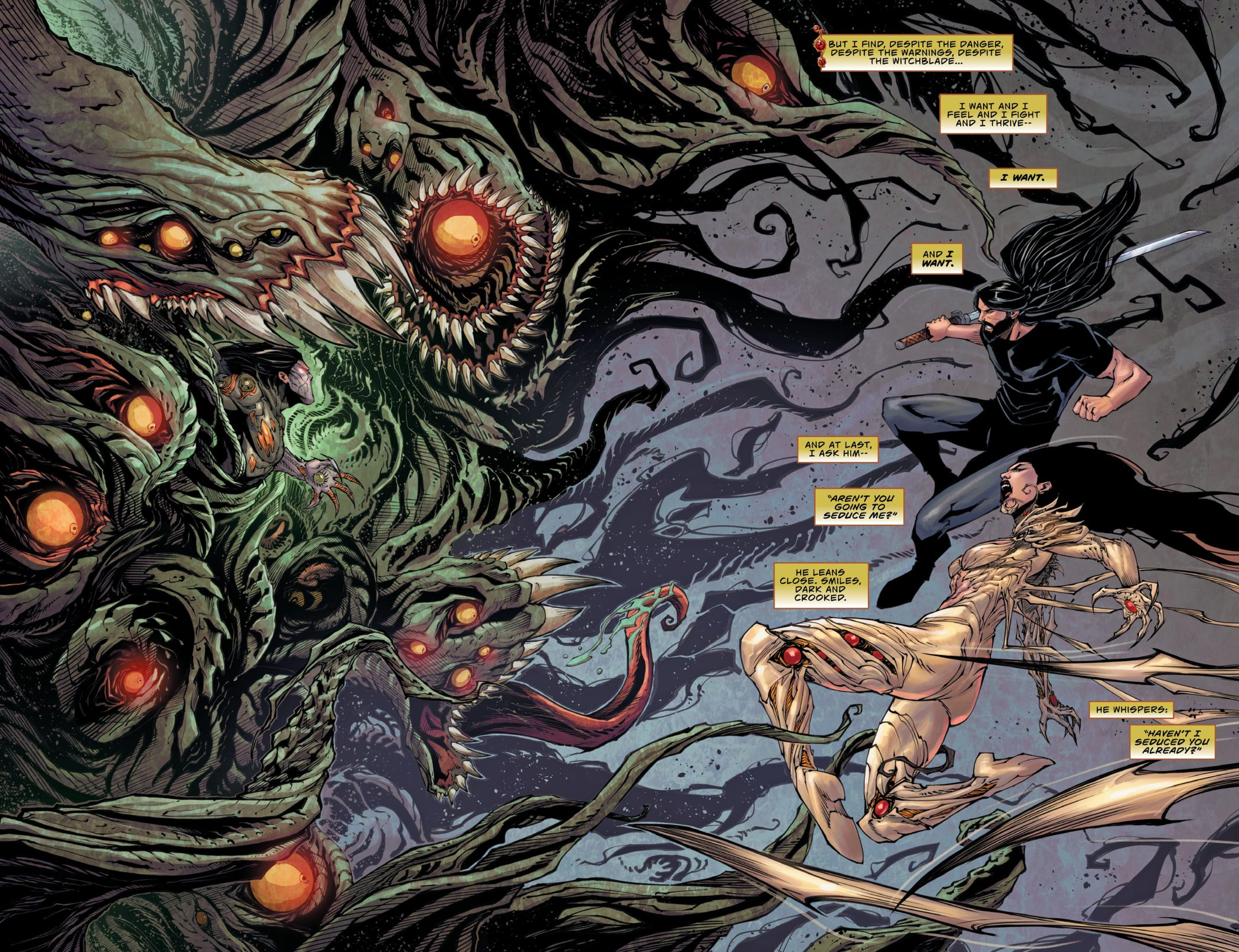

NICOLE CHEWS ME OUT FOR STEALING CASH FROM THE EVIDENCE LOCKER TO PAY FOR THE HOSPITAL BILLS OF THE TRAFFICKED WOMEN.
IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO YOU, WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENS TO ***THEM,*** SARA?
I TELL SIRY I'VE FOUND A LEAD AND I'M GOING UNDERGROUND FOR A FEW DAYS.
STAY SAFE, KID. STAY WARM.
I...I ***WORRY*** ABOUT YOU.
MICHAEL TRIES TO STOP ME, PLEADING WITH ME-- FOR HIS SAKE, FOR JANET'S SAKE, FOR THEIR KIDS' SAKES.
WHAT ABOUT THE CORRUPTION CASE, SARA?
WHAT ABOUT ***YOUR FATHER?***

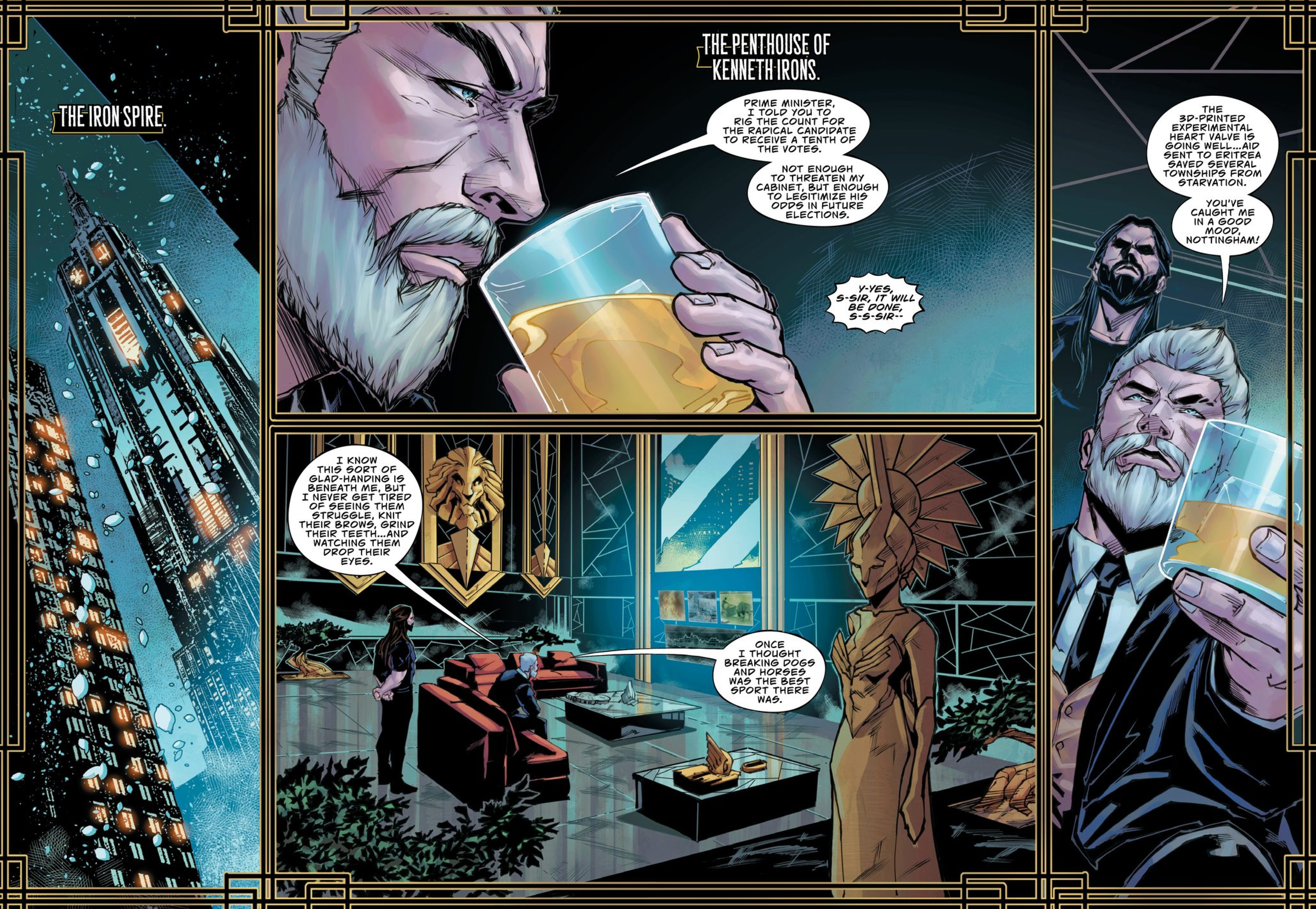

THIS PLACE, NOTTINGHAM SAYS, IS A POCKET DIMENSION THAT OPENS WITH THE USE OF THE SICKLE KEY.
A PORTABLE SPACE THAT CAN BE SET UP IN ANY LOCKED DOOR.
I GIVE HIM SHIT ABOUT IT BEING THE DOJO IN THE MATRIX--PSYCHOLOGICAL MAKE-BELIEVE.
BUT THEN I CATCH A DOUBLE-HEADED BATTLEAX SQUARE IN THE PALM. AND EVEN THROUGH THE WITCHBLADE'S ARMOR, IT HURTS.
EVERYTHING IS MORE REAL THAN I COULD'VE POSSIBLY IMAGINED.
AND WHAT NOTTINGHAM HAS GOT TO SHOW ME...
I NEVER UNDERSTOOD HOW MUCH THE SILENCE HURT, UNTIL I DIDN'T HAVE TO STAY SILENT TO STAY SANE.
I COULDN'T TELL MICHAEL. COULDN'T TELL NICOLE. BUT I CAN TELL IAN.
AND IT'S...
...INTOXICATING.
BUT NO MATTER WHAT THE WITCHBLADE CAN SHOW ME...

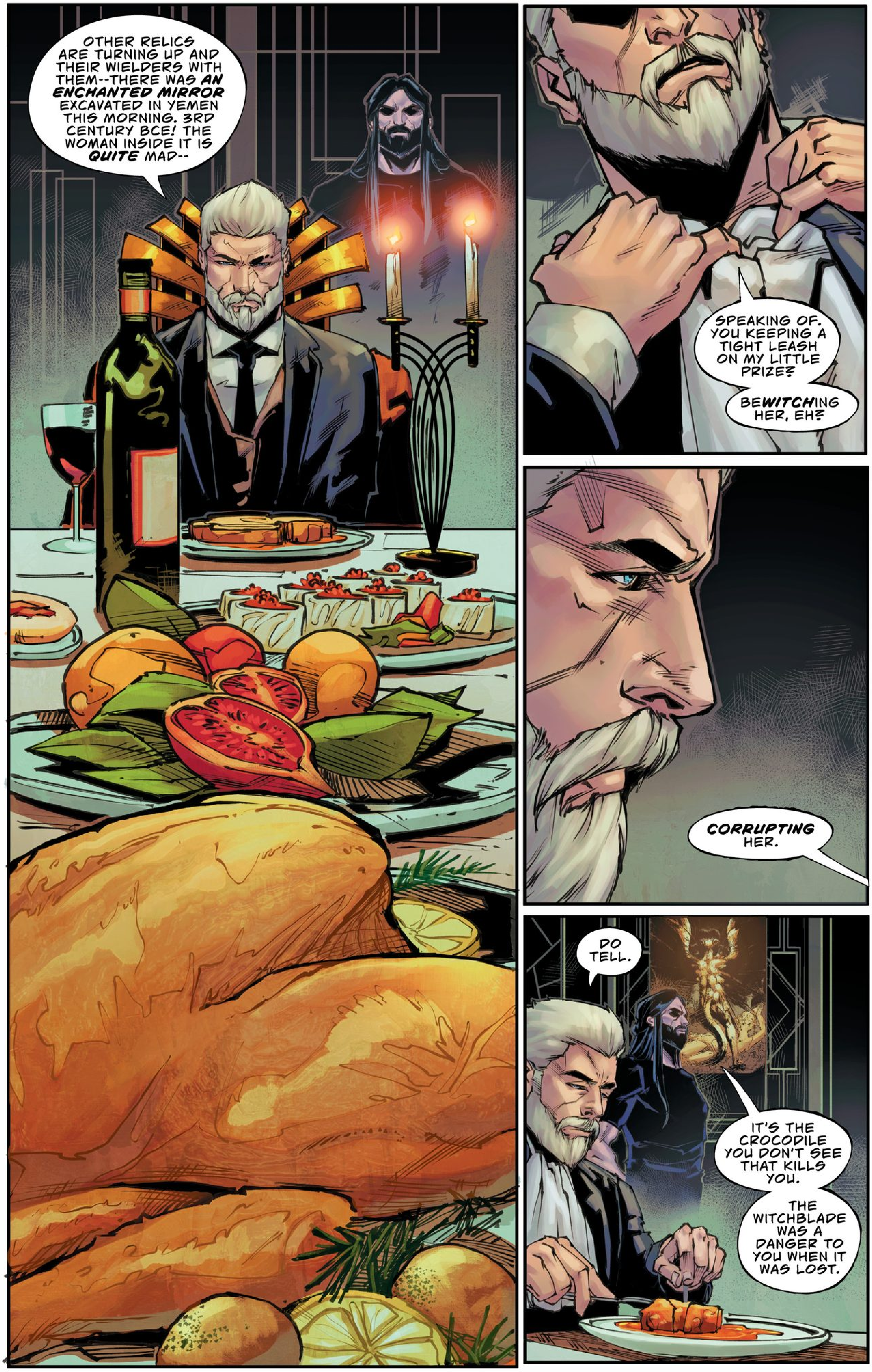

...I DESPISE FEELING OUT OF CONTROL.
NOTTINGHAM TELLS ME TALES OF THE WITCHBLADE, LEGENDS AND RUMORS--THE WOMEN WHO HAVE HELD IT BEFORE ME AND THE POWER THEY POSSESSED.
BUT I DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING I HEAR. I WANT PROOF.
SO I GO HUNTING FOR A SECOND OPINION.
THE WITCHBLADE LETS ME FEEL...THE WEB OF CREATION.
THE THREADS HUMMING, VIBRATING, SCENT AND TASTE AND TEXTURE AND FEELING, FEELING, FEELING.
IT THREATENS TO OVERWHELM ME.
HE THREATENS TO OVERWHELM ME.
NOTTINGHAM'S CALLUSED HANDS, IMPERSONAL. HOW HARD I HAVE TO CROSS MY LEGS, BITE MY LIP, WHENEVER HE'S PATCHING ME UP. PRETENDING I'M JUST GRIMACING IN PAIN.
HE GIVES ME SHIT WHEN I TRY TO BE LESS OF A PIECE OF ONE.
"YOU POSSESS AN IMMORTAL RELIC, AND YOU'RE SPENDING YOUR TIME SHOVELING SNOW FOR OLD LADIES AND HELPING CHILDREN GET HOME SAFE?"
NOTTINGHAM IS DANGEROUS.
YOU VANISHED WHEN IT WAS TIME FOR MY LESSON! WHAT, DID YOU THINK I WAS GONNA SIT PRETTY ALL NIGHT, HOPING FOR THE EDGY INDIE PROM KING TO CALL?
WE WATCH A MOVIE. HALFWAY THROUGH, HE SAYS SOMETHING SNIDE. I PULL THE THREAD, AND HE TELLS ME SOMETHING TERRIBLE ABOUT HIS MOTHER.
THAT GLIMPSE INTO THE WOODS. BEHIND THE MASK OF IAN NOTTINGHAM.
HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS. THE ONLY PERSON I CAN TALK TO ABOUT THE WITCHBLADE.
BUT I WON'T LET HIM IN.
I WON'T LET HIM.
(GASOLINE ASPHALT GRIME SWEAT MUCK MUD SHIT SEWAGE)
(BAKERY SUGAR SUGAR BUTTER FLOUR VANILLA BEAN WARM WARM BUTTER FLOUR WARM)
(SCENT OF WOMEN WOMEN WOMAN ONE)

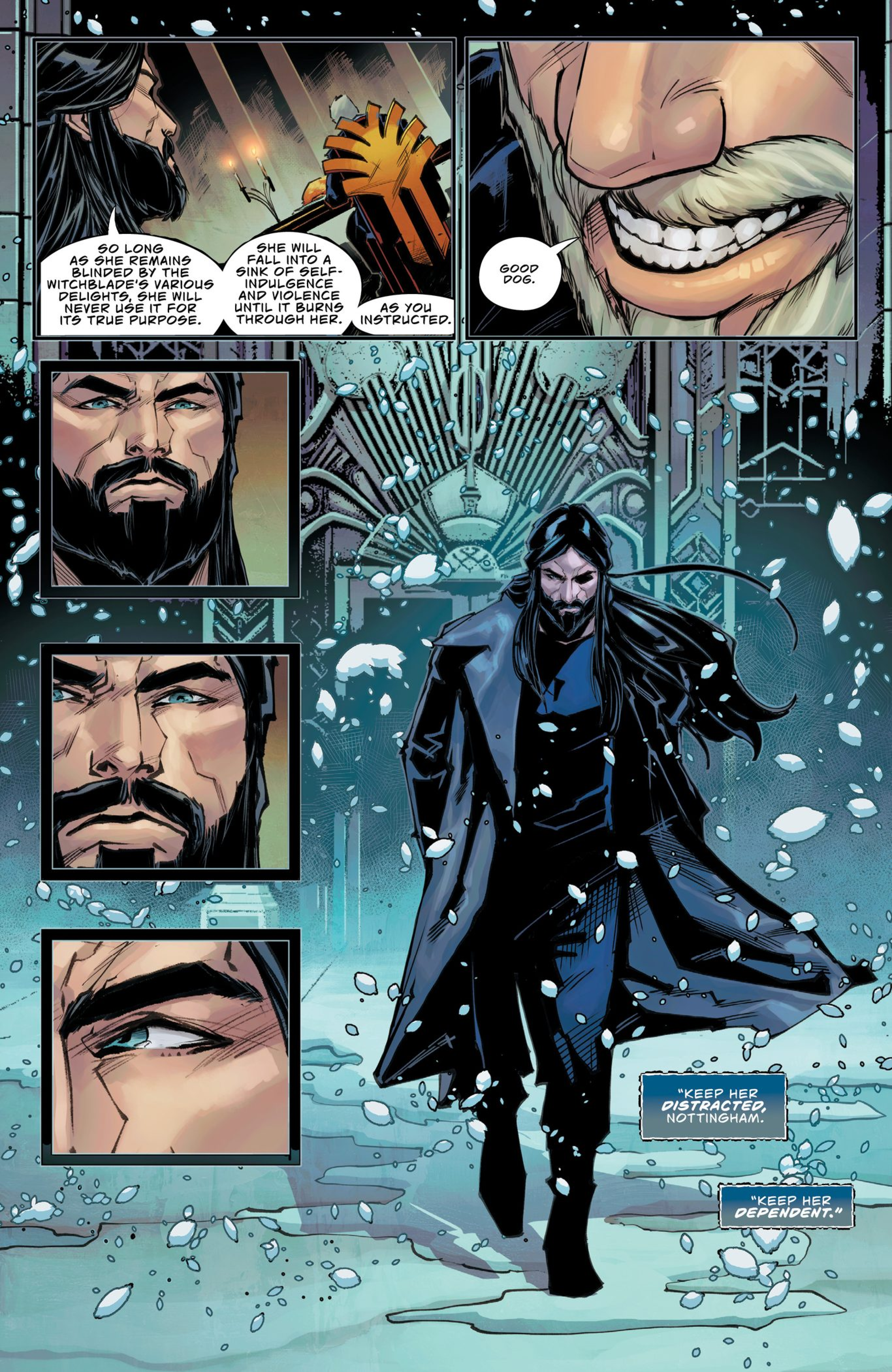

THE WITCHBLADE *REACTS* BEFORE I EVEN KNOW WHAT I WANT.
MY HANDS SHAKE AND SWEAT AS I SCRAMBLE UP THE WALL LIKE A SPIDER, PRAYING I DON'T ***BREAK MY FRICKING NECK...***
I KEEP THINKING OF THE TRAFFICKED WOMEN IN THEIR HOSPITAL BEDS--
OF MY FATHER IN HIS GRAVE--
THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.
WHO CAN I ACTUALLY HELP, WITHOUT THE WITCHBLADE, WITHOUT NOTTINGHAM'S TRAINING?
"YOU ARE A MONSTER, WOMAN. YOU ARE ***OUR*** MONSTER."
(GARBAGE MILDEW RUST SCUM ROT GARBAGE GARBAGE RAT PIGEON ALLEY CAT AND--)
(A SCENT OF SOMETHING ***NEW!***)
(NEW NEW NEW ***WHAT IS THAT?***)
NARROWED DOWN THE DARK WEB CONSPIRACY THEORISTS TO THOSE WHO LEFT TRACES OF NEW YORK CITY RESIDENCE...
THEY'VE SCRUBBED THEIR TRACKS PRETTY WELL...
...BUT THEY WEREN'T EXPECTING SOMEONE TO FOLLOW ***UP.***

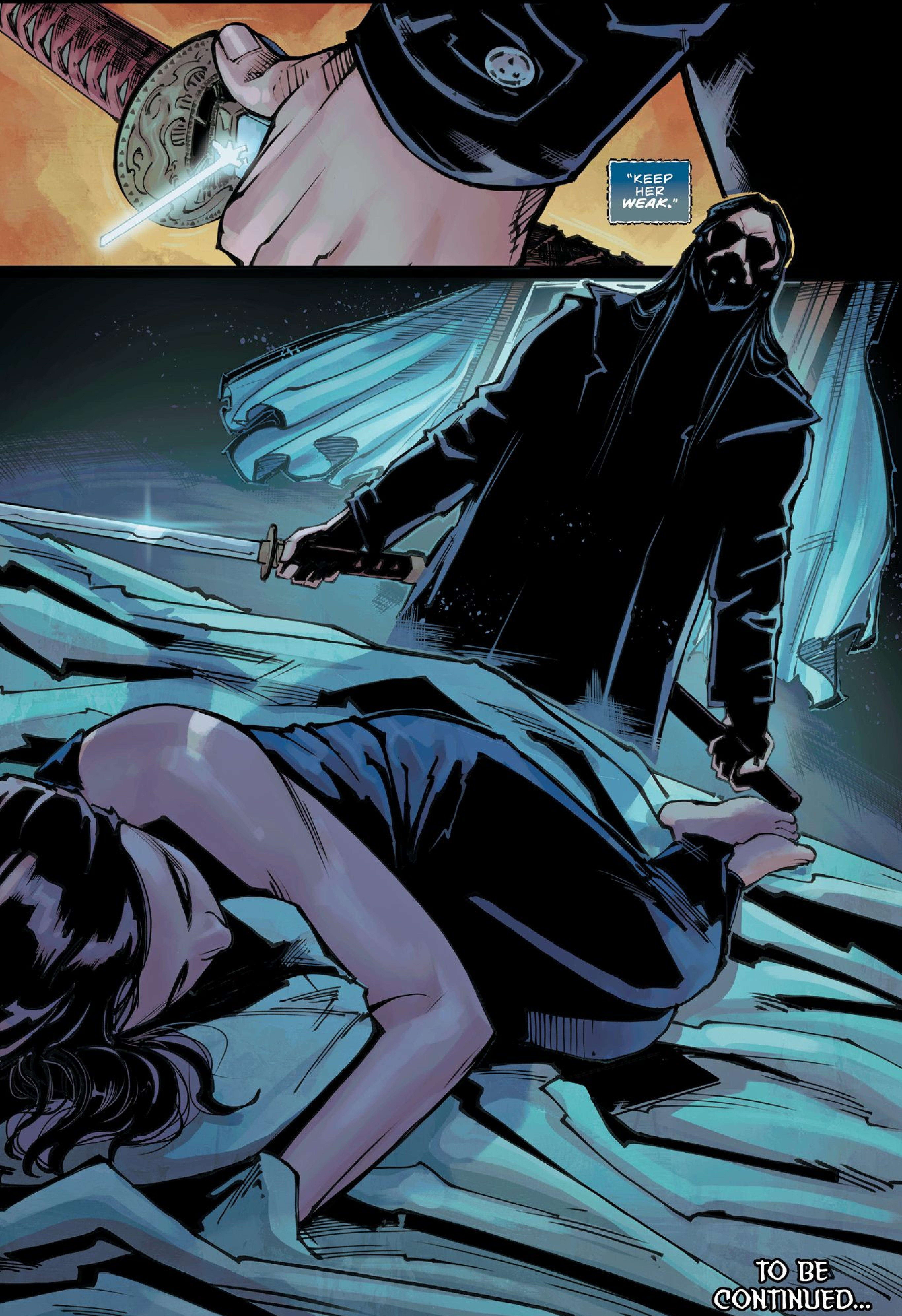

THE CORNER OF MACKLESTON AND DE VRIES. SOMEWHERE NEAR HERE. SOMEONE WITH SOMETHING THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND.
SOMEONE THE WITCHBLADE WANTS ME TO FIND...
...BUT THEN IT'S GONE.
DAMN!
THE WITCHBLADE HUMS AS I RETURN TO IAN'S KEEP.
"DANGER, SARA. DANGER. PREDATOR."
"LION. WOLF. CROCODILE."
"DANGER."


BUT I FIND, DESPITE THE DANGER, DESPITE THE WARNINGS, DESPITE THE WITCHBLADE...
I WANT AND I FEEL AND I FIGHT AND I THRIVE--
I WANT.
AND I WANT.
AND AT LAST, I ASK HIM--
"AREN'T YOU GOING TO SEDUCE ME?"
HE LEANS CLOSE. SMILES, DARK AND CROOKED.
HE WHISPERS:
"HAVEN'T I SEDUCED YOU ALREADY?"


THE IRON SPIRE.
THE PENTHOUSE OF KENNETH IRONS.
PRIME MINISTER, I TOLD YOU TO RIG THE COUNT FOR THE RADICAL CANDIDATE TO RECEIVE A TENTH OF THE VOTES.
NOT ENOUGH TO THREATEN MY CABINET, BUT ENOUGH TO LEGITIMIZE HIS ODDS IN FUTURE ELECTIONS.
Y-YES, S-SIR, IT WILL BE DONE, S-S-SIR--
THE 3D-PRINTED EXPERIMENTAL HEART VALVE IS GOING WELL...AID SENT TO ERITREA SAVED SEVERAL TOWNSHIPS FROM STARVATION.
YOU'VE CAUGHT ME IN A GOOD MOOD, NOTTINGHAM!
I KNOW THIS SORT OF GLAD-HANDING IS BENEATH ME, BUT I NEVER GET TIRED OF SEEING THEM STRUGGLE, KNIT THEIR BROWS, GRIND THEIR TEETH...AND WATCHING THEM DROP THEIR EYES.
ONCE I THOUGHT BREAKING DOGS AND HORSES WAS THE BEST SPORT THERE WAS.


OTHER RELICS ARE TURNING UP AND THEIR WIELDERS WITH THEM--THERE WAS **AN ENCHANTED MIRROR** EXCAVATED IN YEMEN THIS MORNING. 3RD CENTURY BCE! THE WOMAN INSIDE IT IS **QUITE** MAD--
SPEAKING OF. YOU KEEPING A TIGHT LEASH ON MY LITTLE PRIZE?
BE**WITCH**ING HER, EH?
CORRUPTING HER.
DO TELL.
IT'S THE CROCODILE YOU DON'T SEE THAT KILLS YOU.
THE WITCHBLADE WAS A DANGER TO YOU WHEN IT WAS LOST.


SO LONG AS SHE REMAINS BLINDED BY THE WITCHBLADE'S VARIOUS DELIGHTS, SHE WILL NEVER USE IT FOR ITS TRUE PURPOSE.
SHE WILL FALL INTO A SINK OF SELF-INDULGENCE AND VIOLENCE UNTIL IT BURNS THROUGH HER.
AS YOU INSTRUCTED.
GOOD DOG.
"KEEP HER *DISTRACTED,* NOTTINGHAM.
"KEEP HER *DEPENDENT.*"


"KEEP HER *WEAK.*"
TO BE CONTINUED...

NEXT ISSUE!
"MY FATHER"

CITY OF NEW YOR
DETECTIVE

IN MEMORIAM

ELENA SALCEDO

JANUARY 19TH, 1975 - AUGUST 22ND, 2024

"I love people who make me laugh. I honestly think it's the thing I like most, to laugh. It cures a multitude of ills. It's probably the most important thing in a person."
– Audrey Hepburn

A FEW WORDS ABOUT ELENA...

Over the course of the next few months, we'd like to create a space to share stories of the ways Elena touched the lives of so many with a few first-hand accounts...

Comics is a life/business that, more often than not, is a wonderful, rewarding, and endlessly interesting world to live in. But (there's always a but) it is not always welcoming to the faint-hearted. Because as wonderful as it is, comics can be a challenging, head-scratching, and stressful place. Fortunately for me and Top Cow, as well as the fans and creators who share a love for this amazing world of make-believe, Elena Salcedo was far from faint-hearted. Challenging or joyful, she loved all of it. And for that, I will be eternally grateful. But (there's that word again) what I will be most grateful for was her friendship.

Because you see, as fiercely loyal and indispensable Elena was to Top Cow, she was even more so as a friend. And if you were someone lucky enough to call her friend, you knew the value of that was immeasurable. And since her untimely passing, the sheer number of fans and professionals that have reached out and expressed their shock and sadness only reinforces that truth. Rest In Peace, Elena. I miss our friendship and your smile every day.

– Marc Silvestri

•••••

One of the greatest gifts for anyone in a position of leadership is being lucky enough to spot talent. I met Elena when she volunteered at the Top Cow booth at New York Comic-Con shortly after I joined the company. She ran circles around every other volunteer with her dedication and efficiency. She was so spectacular before long we were flying her around the country to help us run the booth. I told her if she ever found herself out in LA, I would hire her. And because Elena rarely did things in half measure, she moved out to LA ensuring I made good on my promise.

At the end of the day, it's hard to describe what Elena did for Top Cow and what her role was there because, over time, the honest answer was - everything. From unpaid volunteer to Vice President of the company, Elena was the living embodiment of what you can accomplish with passion, hard work, and ingenuity.

As a teammate, Elena was amazing, but it paled in comparison to her loyalty and generosity if you were lucky enough to call her friend. She was honest and real and gave the absolute best hugs. She was always there when you needed her. Her laugh was magic. She was tiny but full of more life and fight and love than almost anyone I've ever met. Truly she was one of a kind.

– Filip Sablik

•••••

Laughter. Improbable but constant laughter. That's the memory of Elena I'll treasure most of all.

The people who work behind the scenes at comic book conventions, the people whose names you don't know, they are the ones who make it possible for the names you do know to breeze in and out to smile and sign autographs.

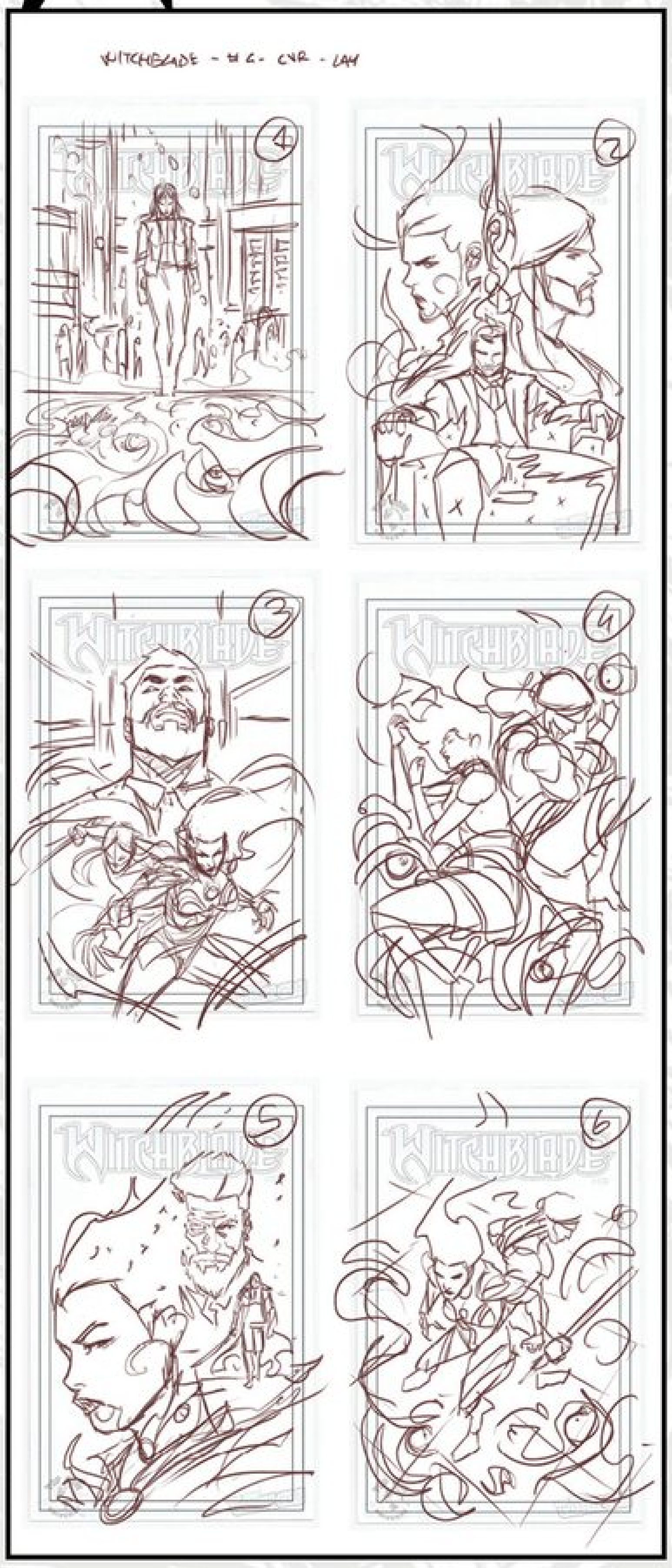
Elena worked behind the scenes, not just at shows like San Diego, but back in the Top Cow offices, figuring out Kickstarter campaigns, filling pledges, making sure everyone gets paid, finding new talent, and generally keeping the wheels turning so that fans could enjoy everything Top Cow has to offer. And when you work behind the scenes, only you can truly see the other people who work behind the scenes. I feel very fortunate to have gotten to know Elena, and her partner, Dan, during the course of dozens of comic conventions on the west coast. I've always done my own setup and got to know Elena during the short time that precedes each show. She would be my first check-in after I'd put my own booth together, and if she was too busy or too stressed, we would make plans to spend some time together during the always crazy, busy days that followed.

And we'd laugh. At each other's expense, at Dan's expense, about our colleagues, about our books, and all the crazy stories that inevitably get generated because we had to get *this* book to that show.

Laughter. Improbable but constant laughter.
Elena ♥

– Richard Starkings

WITCHBLADE #4 Gallery • Cover A Process


WITCHBLADE - #6 - CVR - LAY
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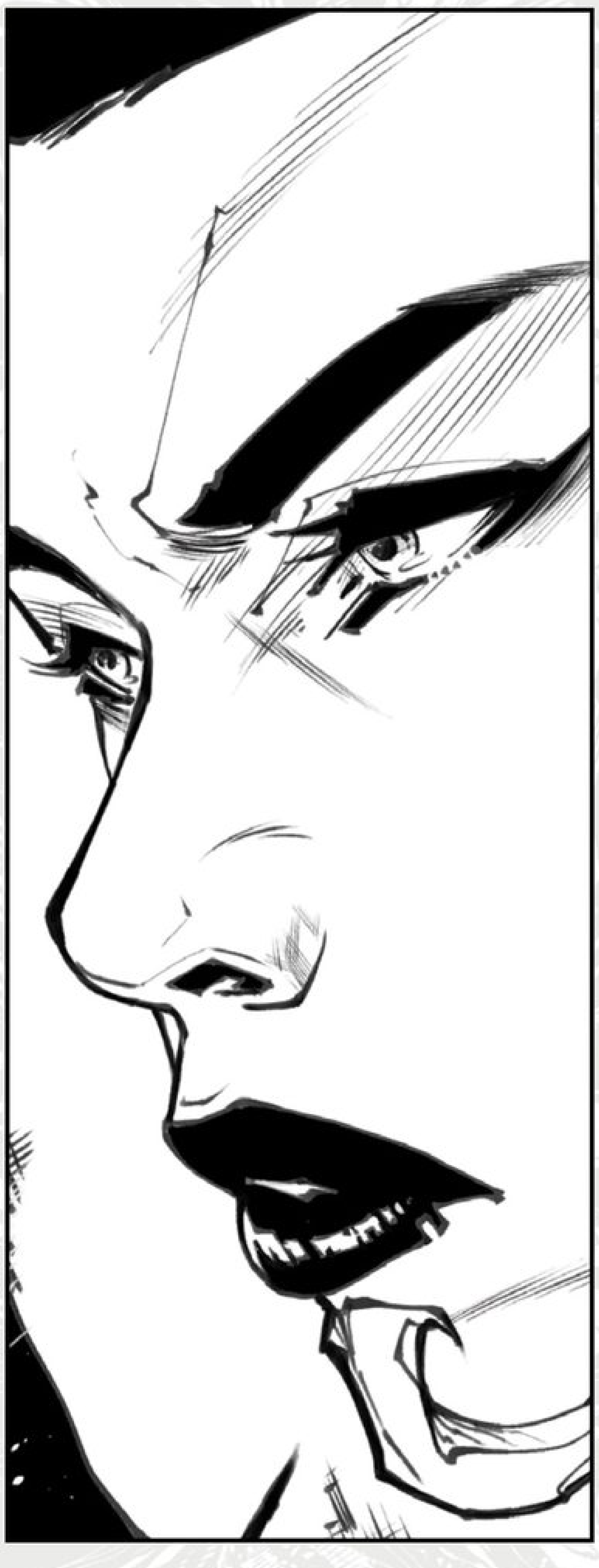
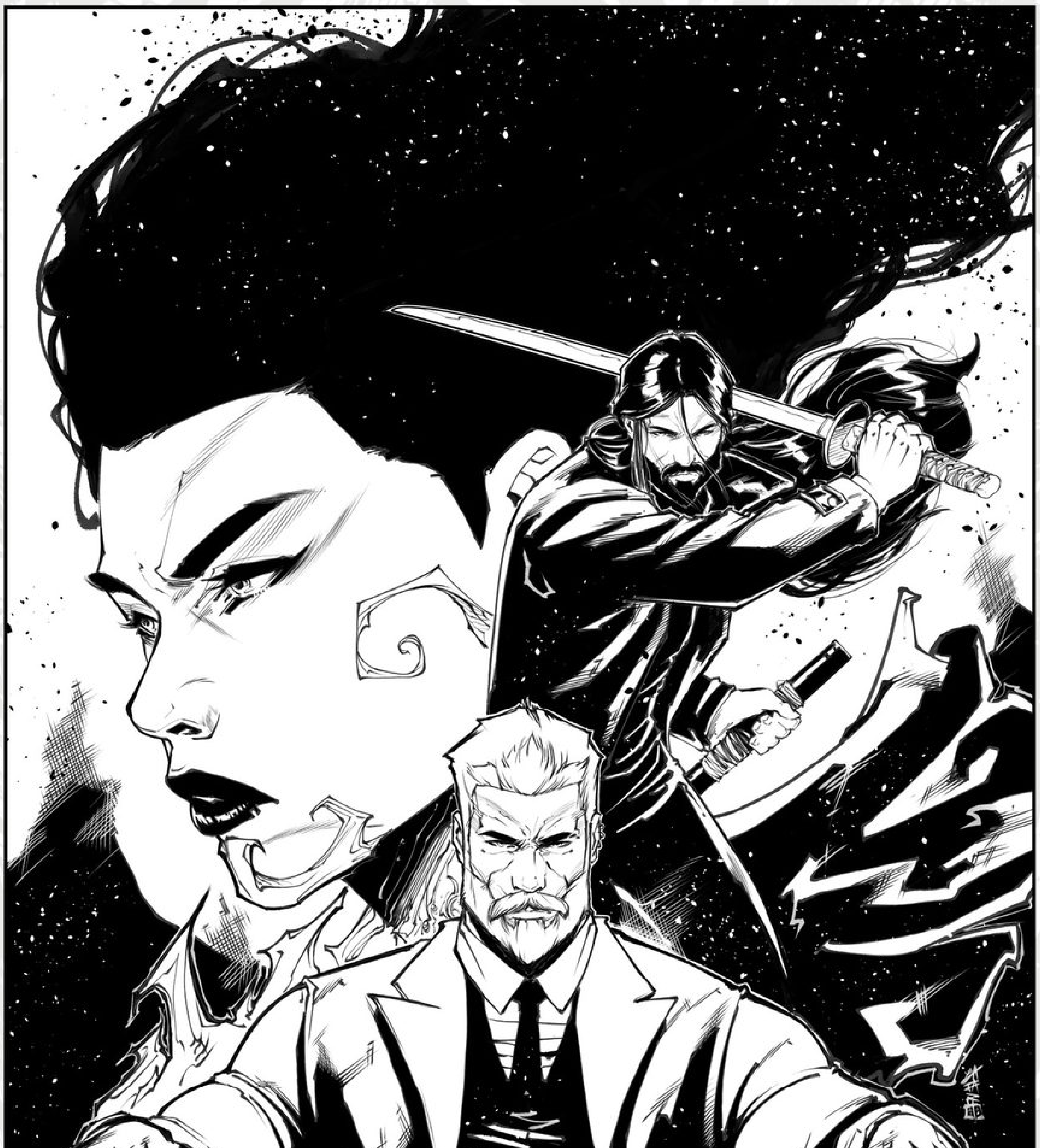
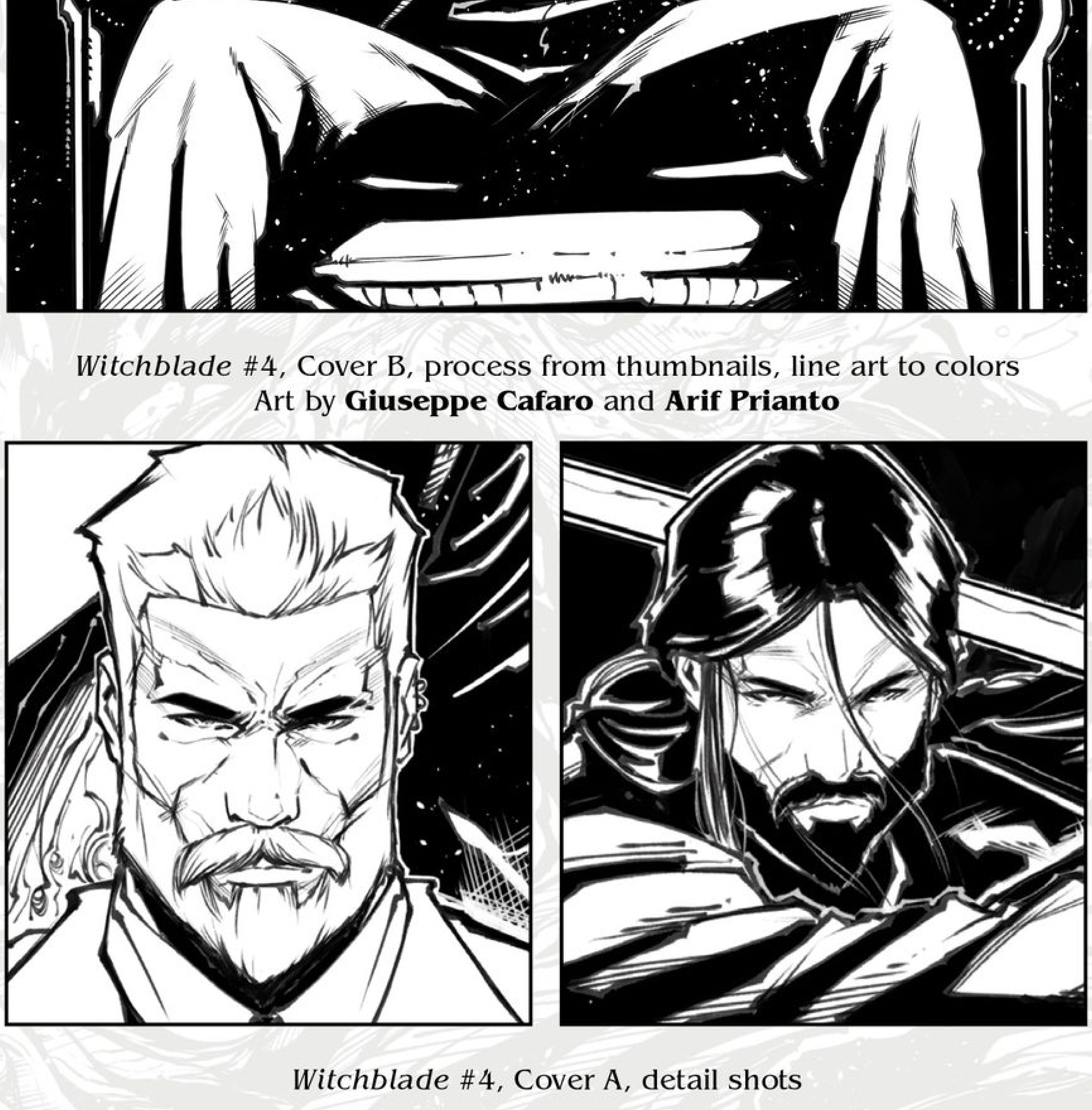


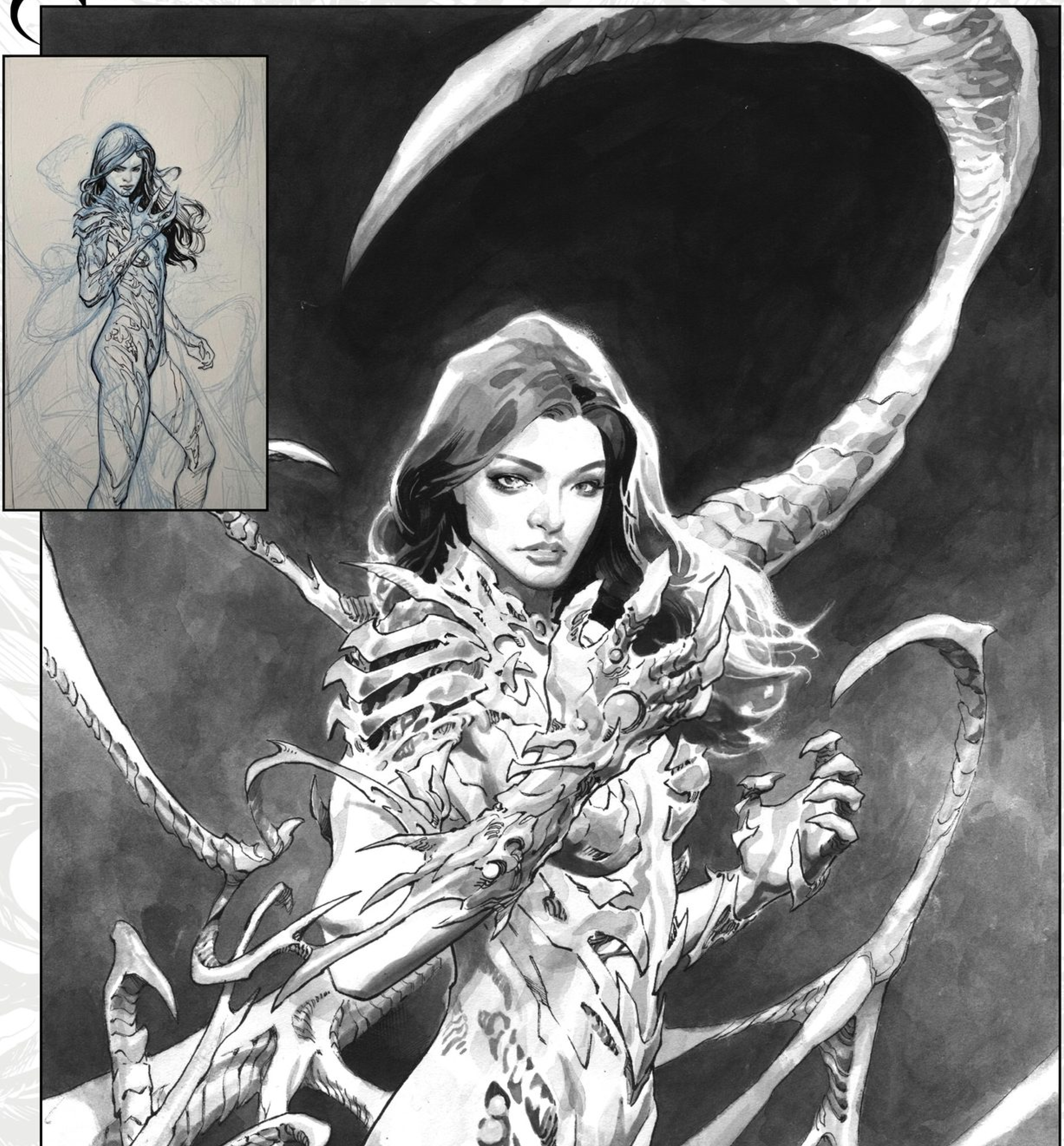


Witchblade #4, Cover B, process from thumbnails, line art to colors
Art by **Giuseppe Cafaro** and **Arif Prianto**



Witchblade #4, Cover A, detail shots

WITCHBLADE #4 Gallery • Cover B Process

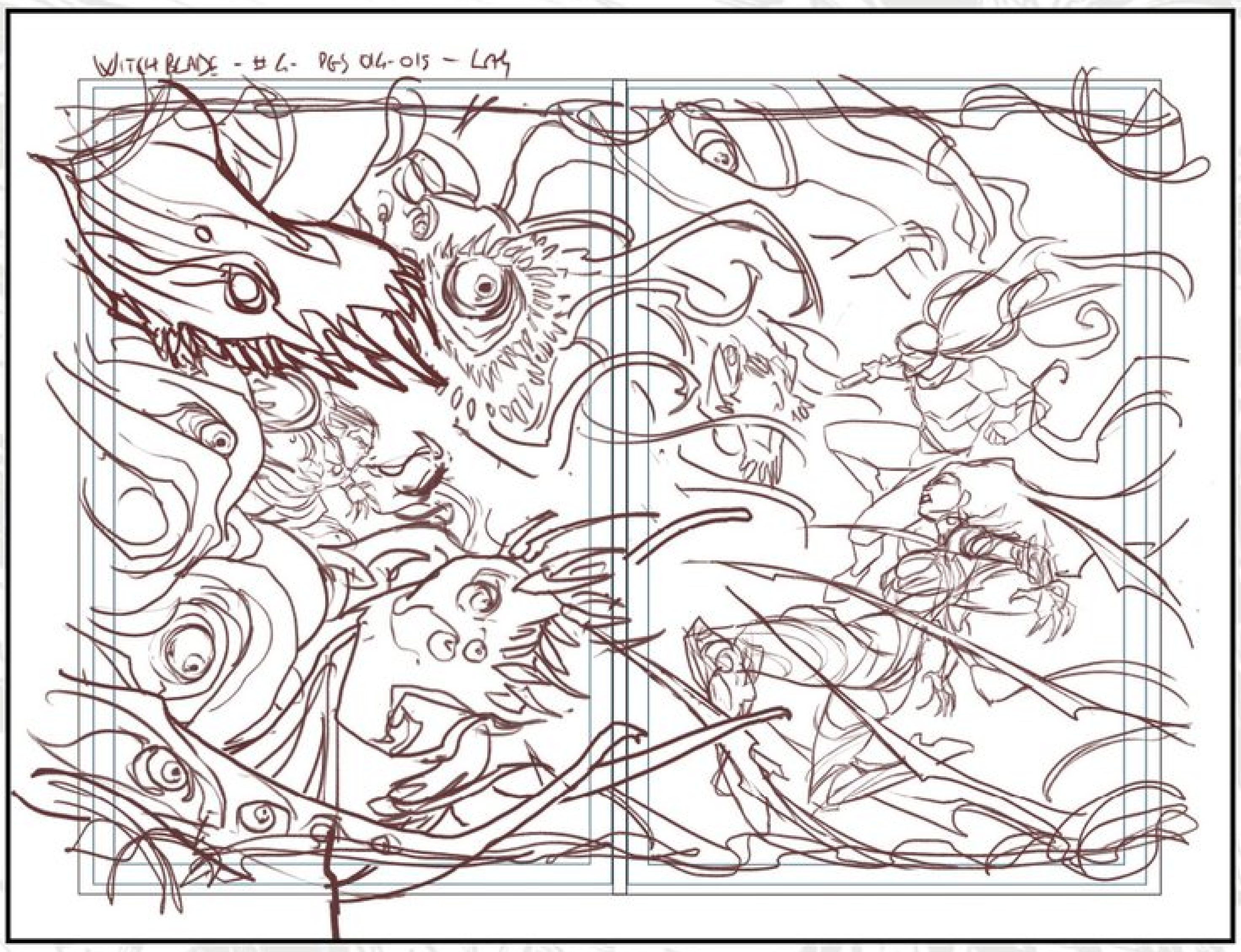


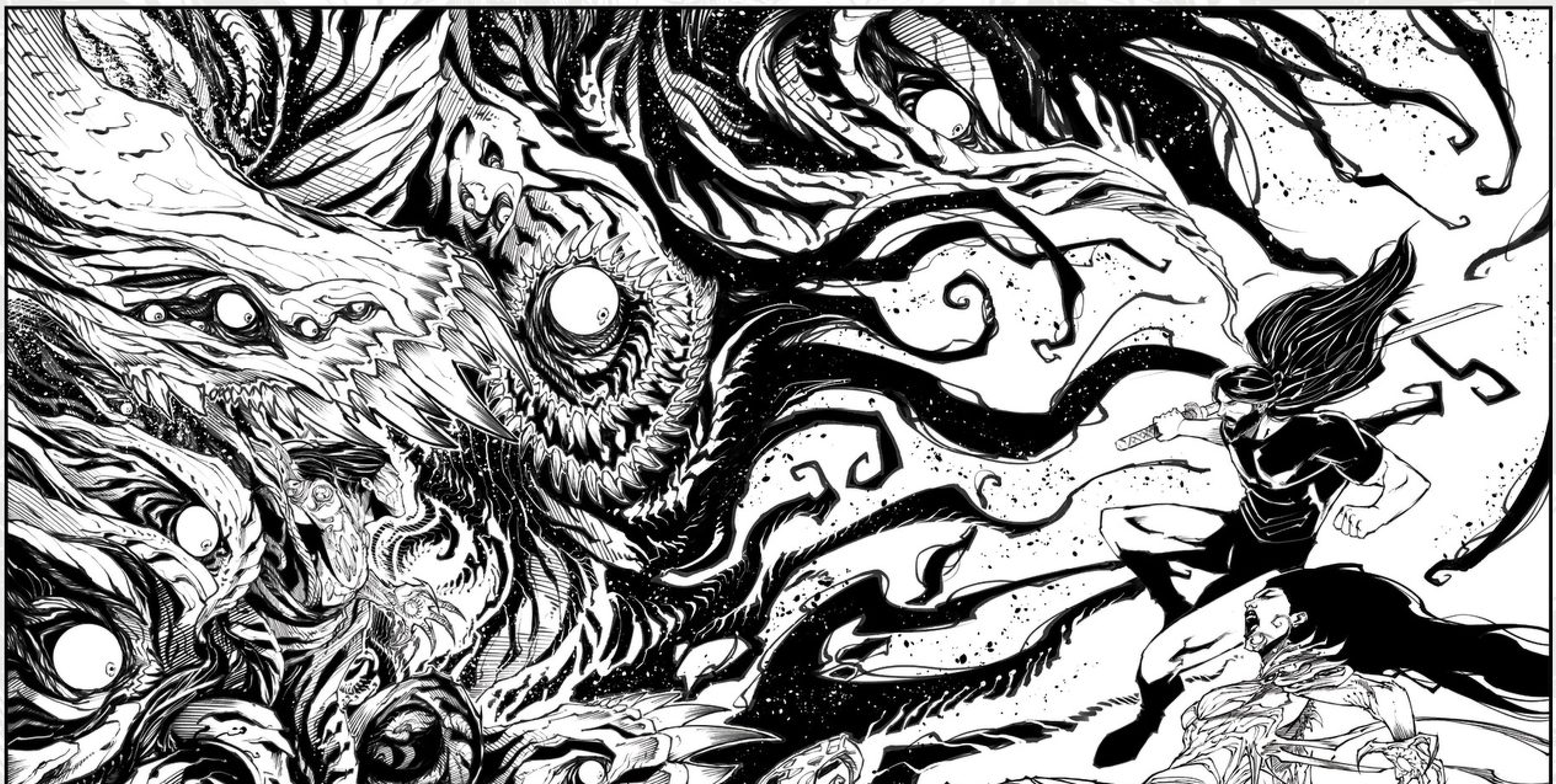
Witchblade #4, Cover B, process from thumbnail, line art to colors
Art by **Jerome Opeña** and **Sunny Gho**

WITCHBLADE®

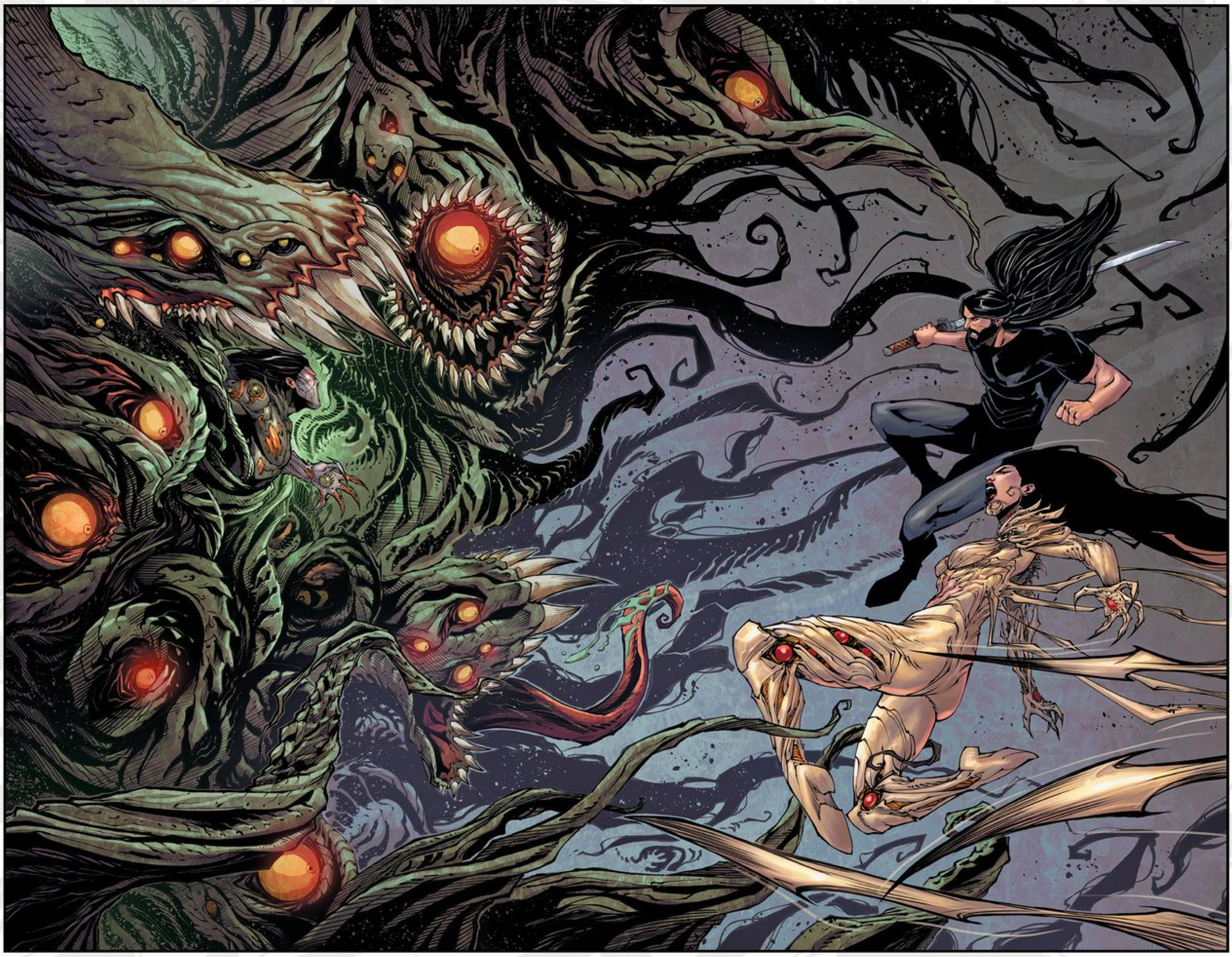
#4 Gallery • Page Process

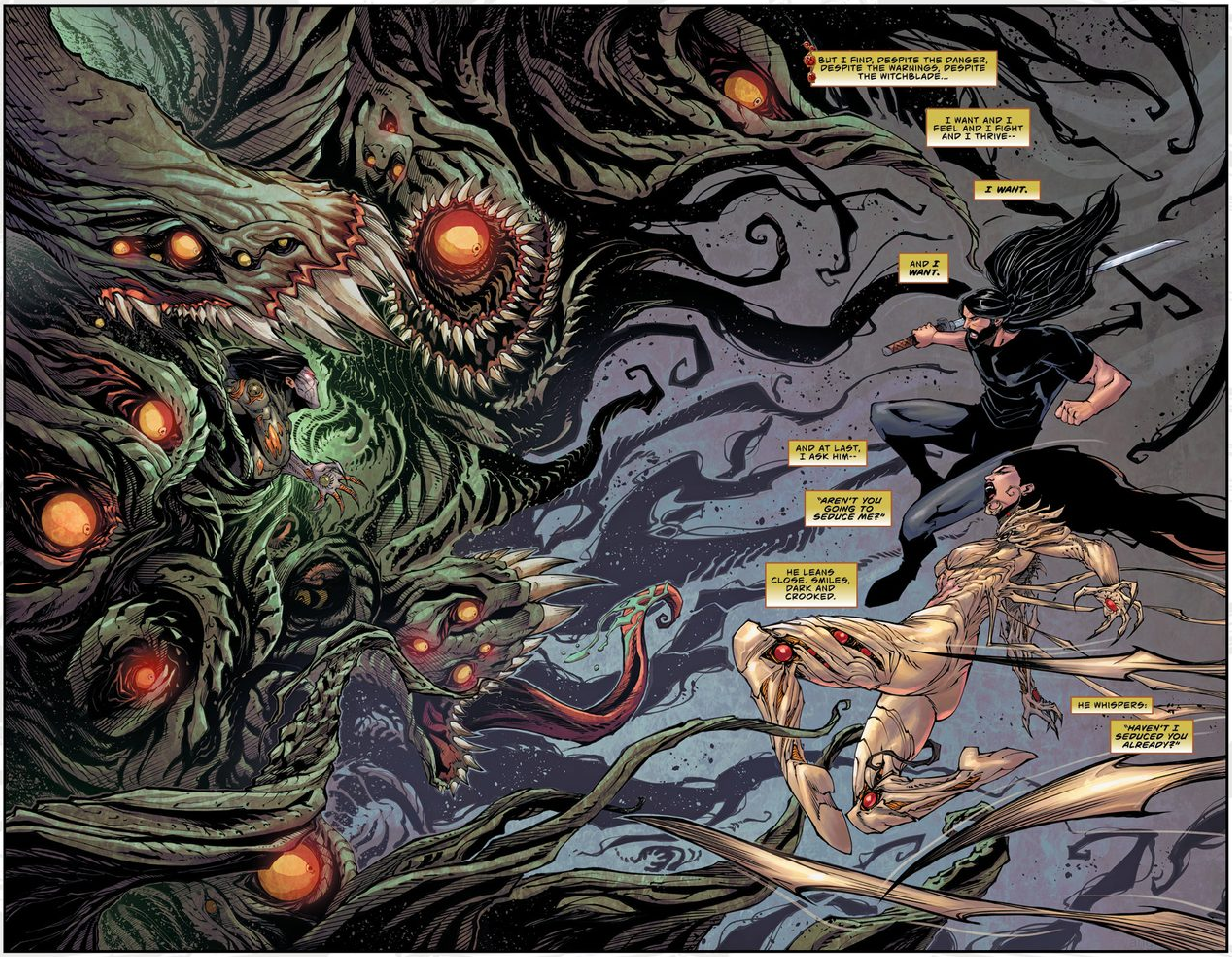
We hope everybody enjoyed this lttle easter egg of one of Top Cow's signature characters. Turn the page to catch even a little more.


WITCHBLADE - #4 - PGS 014-015 - LAY



Witchblade #4, pages 14-15, process from thumbnails, line art, colors to letters

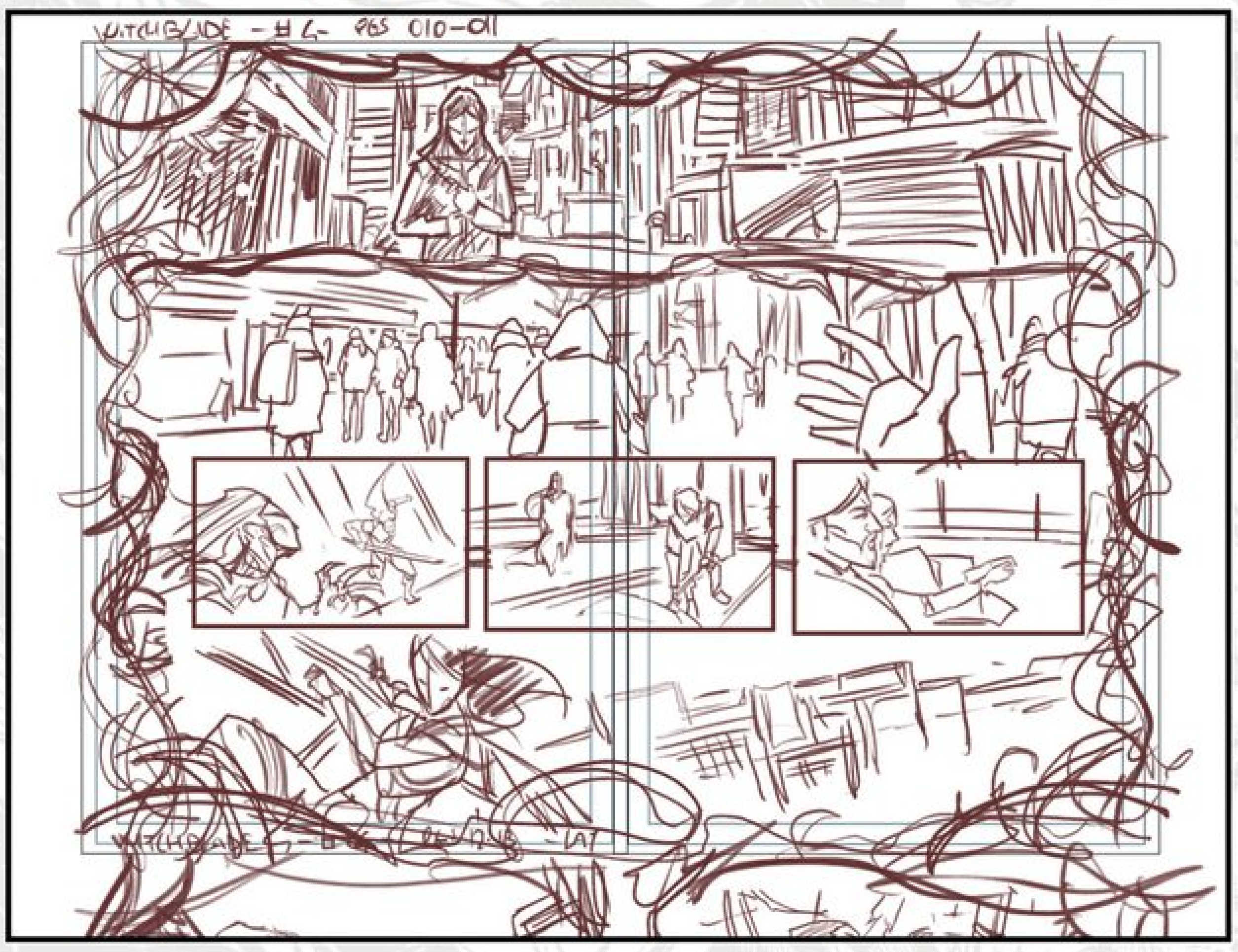


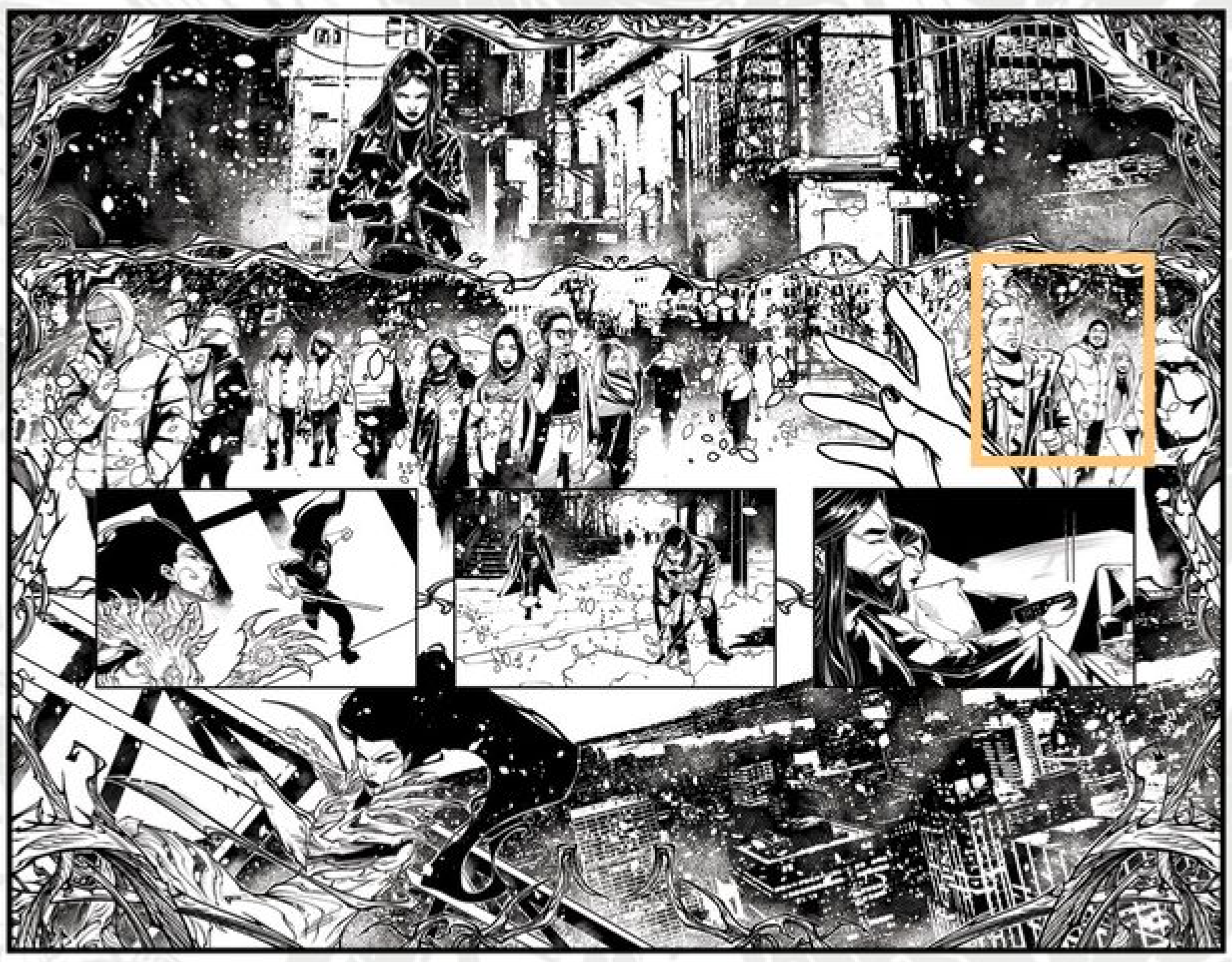

BUT I FIND, DESPITE THE DANGER, DESPITE THE WARNINGS, DESPITE THE WITCHBLADE...
I WANT AND I FEEL AND I FIGHT AND I THRIVE--
I WANT.
AND *I WANT.*
AND AT LAST, I ASK HIM--
"AREN'T YOU GOING TO SEDUCE ME?"
HE LEANS CLOSE. SMILES, DARK AND CROOKED.
HE WHISPERS:
"HAVEN'T I SEDUCED YOU ALREADY?"

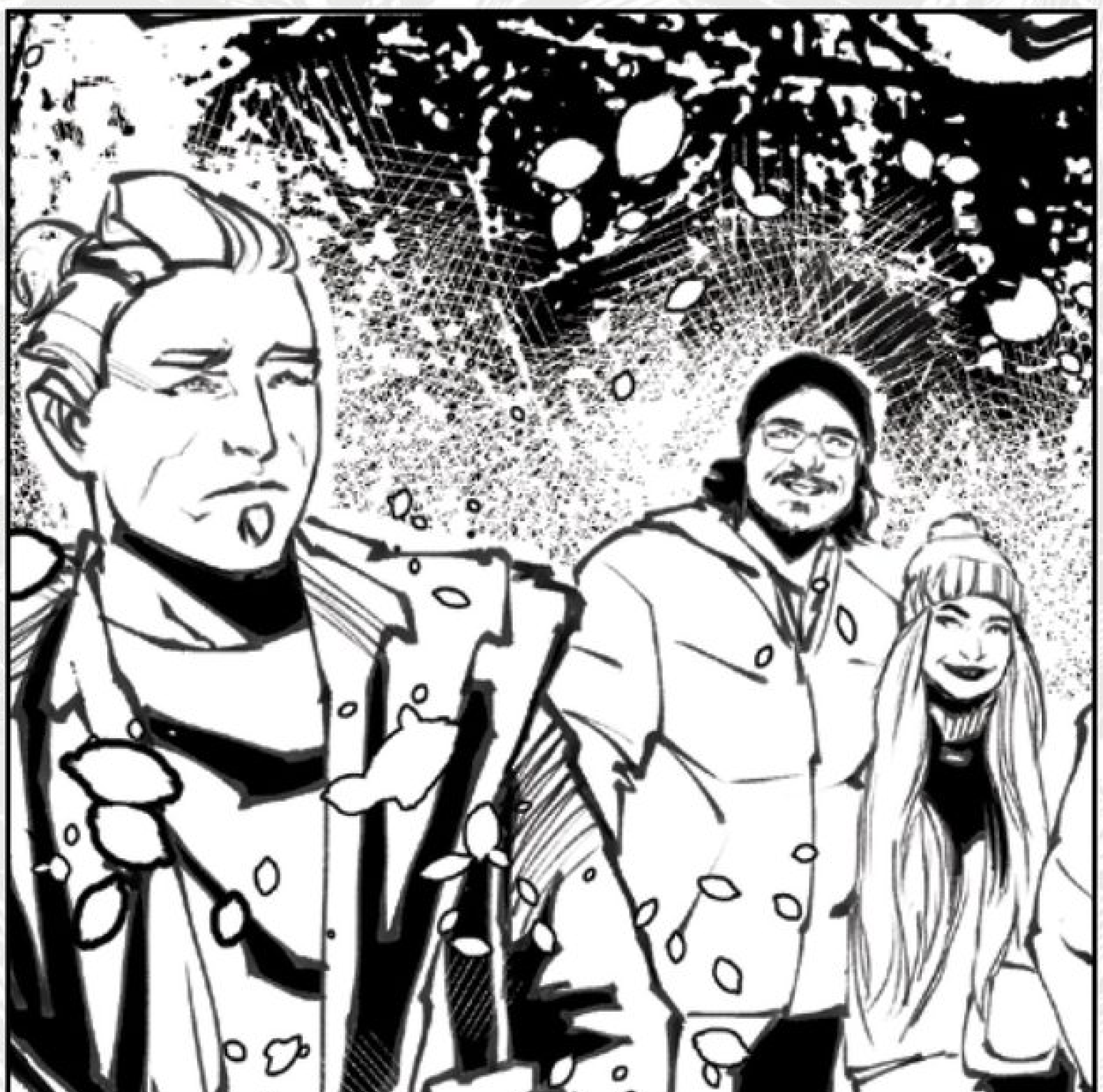
WITCHBLADE®

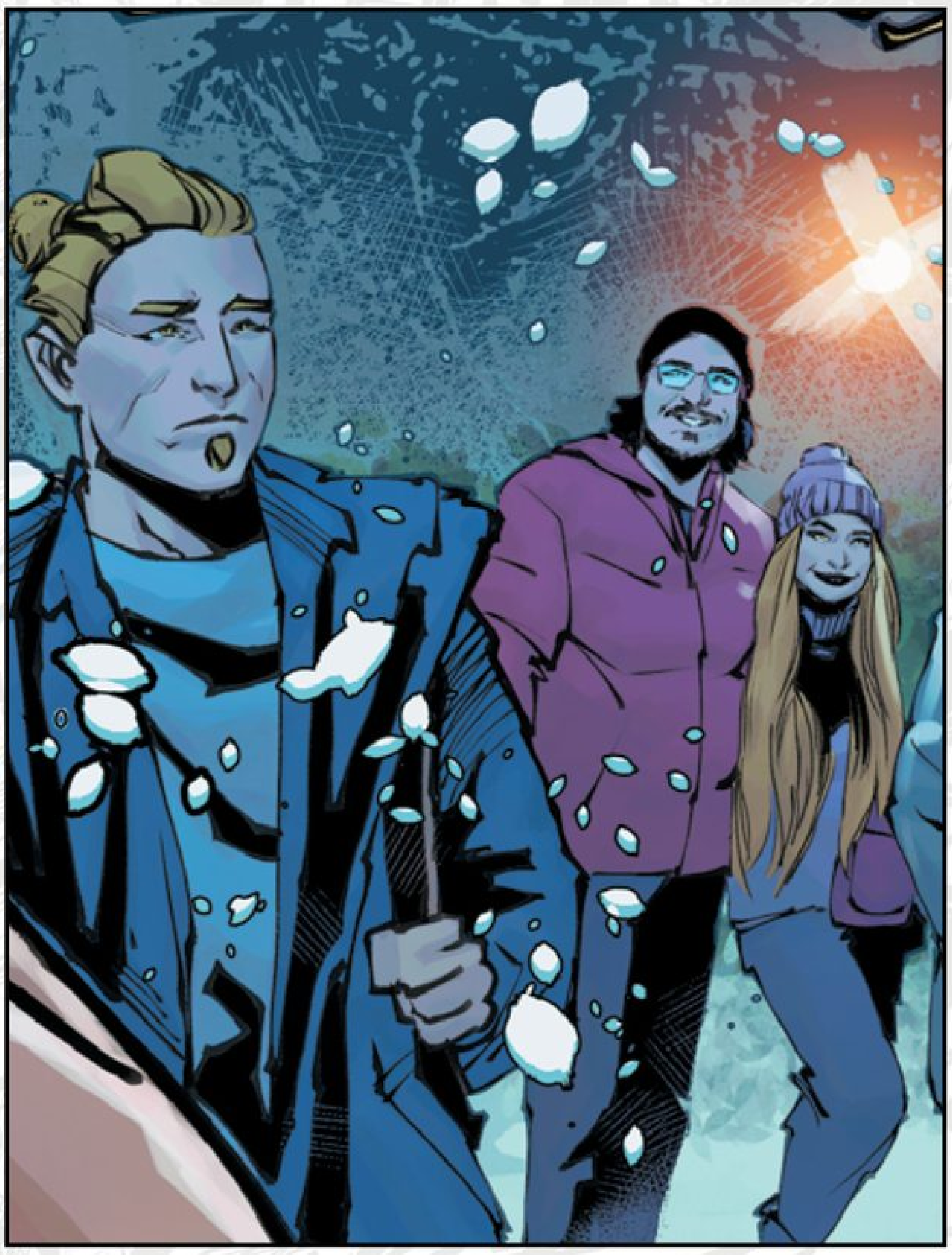
#4 Gallery • Snapshot

Blink and you'll miss this special couple showing up in *Witchblade* #4.


WITCHBLADE - #4 - PGS 010-011







Just when you thought it was safe to go for a walk, the artist draws you into the book.

Creative Team

Marguerite Bennett is a GLAAD-nominated, New York Times-bestselling comic book writer based in Los Angeles.

Her credits include DC Comics' *Bombshells, Batwoman* and *RWBY*, along with *Animosity*, *Horde*, and *Insexts* through Aftershock Comics, and *MOTHER OF MADNESS* with *Game of Thrones* superstar Emilia Clarke for Image Comics. She has written *Might Morphin Power Ranger*s for Boom Studios, *Josie and the Pussycats* through Archie, *A-Force* and *Years of Future Past* at Marvel, *Red Sonja* and *Sheena* from Dynamite, and the indie horror darling *The Lot* for Bad Idea.

She is the lead writer of *Ark: The Animated Serie*s from Studio Wildcard.

Giuseppe Cafaro is an Italian artist who is based in Caserta, Italy. He started his professional career with the Italian publisher GGStudio, and right after, in 2012, he started to work for Aspen Comics on books like *Soulfire, Fathom: Kiani* and *Trish out of Water*, and Zenescope Entertainment as a cover artist for several years.

He worked over the last 10 years with other publishers, like DC Comics, on *Suicide Squad* and *Catwoman*, and Dynamite Entertainment, on *Red Sonja* and *Vampirella*. He also worked on graphic novels for Boom Studios based on the *Power Rangers* franchise.

In 2021, he collaborated with Tim Seeley and Steve Orlando on *LOADED BIBLE* for Image Comics. Also, he worked on some short stories for Heavy Metal with Blake Northcott and with Phil Smith for the book *Brik Jones: Attorney for Earth*, for his publisher Fighting Lion Comics.

Arif Prianto followed his dreams of working in comics and began his career as a professional colorist in 2007. Since then he has worked on titles from Top Cow Productions, Inc on *WITCHBLADE, THE DARKNESS*, for DC on *Batman & The Joker, Dark Knights of Steel,* and for Marvel on *Venom* and *Spider Woman*. He says that coloring comics is "the best job ever!"

Troy Peteri has lettered everything from *The Avengers, Iron Man, Wolverine, Amazing Spider-Man* and *X-Men* to more recent titles such as *WITCHBLADE, CYBERFORCE,* and *Batman/Wonder Woman: The Brave & The Bold*.

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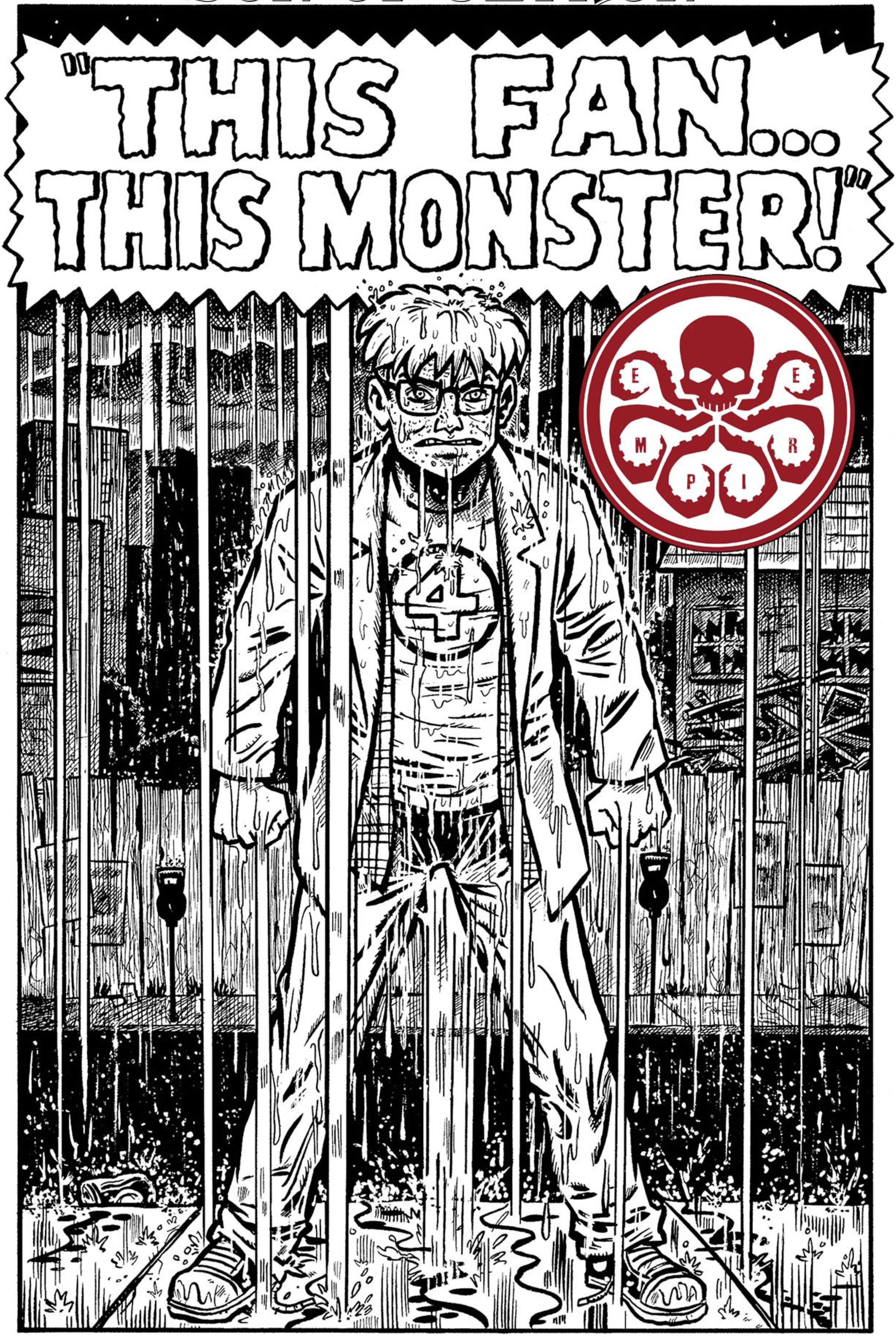
"THIS FAN... THIS MONSTER!"
E M P I R E
4